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A Child of the Jago

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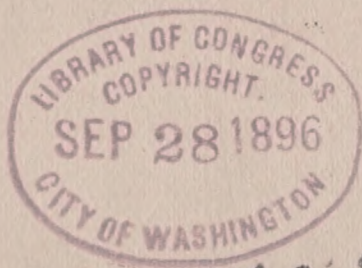
BY
Arthur Morrison

Author of
"TALES OF MEAN STREETS"



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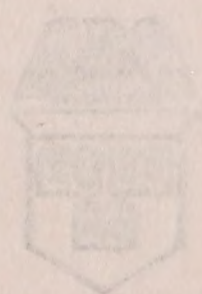
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TO

ARTHUR OSBORNE JAY

VICAR OF HOLY TRINITY, SHOREDITCH

—*Woe unto the foolish prophets,
that follow their own spirit, and
have seen nothing !*

—*Because, even because they
have seduced my people, saying,
Peace ; and there was no peace ;
and one built up a wall, and lo,
others daubed it with untempered
mortar :*

*Say unto them which daub it
with untempered mortar that it
shall fall : there shall be an
overflowing shower ; and ye, O
great hailstones, shall fall ; and
a stormy wind shall rend it.*

*Lo, when the wall is fallen,
shall it not be said unto you,
Where is the daubing wherewith
ye have daubed it ?*

— EZEKIEL xiii, 3, 10-12

A Child of the Jago

I

It was past the mid of a summer night in the old Jago. The narrow street was all the blacker for the lurid sky; for there was a fire in a further part of Shoreditch, and the welkin was an infernal coppery glare. Below, the hot, heavy air lay, a rank oppression, on the contorted forms of those who made for sleep on the pavement: and in it, and through it all, there rose from foul earth and grimed walls a close, mingled stink—the odour of the Jago.

From where, off Shoreditch High Street, a narrow passage, set across with posts, gave menacing entrance on one end of Old Jago Street, to where the other end lost

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itself in the black beyond Jago Row ; from where Jago Row began south at Meakin Street, to where it ended north at Honey Lane ; there the Jago, for one hundred years the blackest pit in London, lay and festered ; and half way along Old Jago Street a narrow archway gave upon Jago Court, the blackest hole in all that pit.

A square of two hundred and fifty yards or less—that was all there was of the Jago. But in that square the human population swarmed in thousands. Old Jago Street, New Jago Street, Half Jago street lay parallel, east and west ; Jago Row at one end and Edge Lane at the other lay parallel also, stretching north and south : foul ways all. What was too vile for Kate Street, Seven Dials, and Ratcliff Highway in its worst day, what was too useless, incapable and corrupt—all that teemed in the Old Jago.

Old Jago Street lay black and close under the quivering red sky ; and slinking

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forms, as of great rats, followed one another quickly between the posts in the gut by the High Street, and scattered over the Jago. For the crowd about the fire was now small, the police was there in force, and every safe pocket had been tried. Soon the incursion ceased, and the sky, flickering and brightening no longer, settled to a sullen flush. On the pavement some writhed wearily, longing for sleep; others, despairing of it, sat and lolled, and a few talked. They were not there for lack of shelter, but because in this weather repose was less unlikely in the street than within doors; and the lodgings of the few who nevertheless abode at home were marked, here and there, by the lights visible from the windows. For in this place none ever slept without a light, because of three sorts of vermin that light in some sort keeps at bay: vermin which added to existence here a terror not to be guessed by the unafflicted: who object to being told of it.

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For on them that lay writhen and gasping on the pavement ; on them that sat among them ; on them that rolled and blasphemed in the lighted rooms ; on every moving creature in this, the Old Jago, day and night, sleeping and waking, the third plague of Egypt, and more, lay unceasing.

The stifling air took a further oppression from the red sky. By the dark entrance to Jago Court a man arose, flinging out an oath, and sat with his head bowed in his hands.

“ Ah-h-h-h-,” he said. “ I wish I was dead : an’ kep’ a cawfy shop. He looked aside from his hands at his neighbours, but Kiddo Cook’s idea of heaven was no new thing, and the sole answer was a snort from a dozing man a yard away.

Kiddo Cook felt in his pocket and produced a pipe and a screw of paper. “ This is a bleed’n’ unsocial sort o’ evenin’ party, this is,” he said. “ An’ ’ere ’s the on’y real toff in the mob with ’ardly ’arf a pipe-

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full left, an' no lights. D' y' 'ear, me lord" —leaning toward the dozing neighbour—"got a match?"

"Go t' 'ell!"

"O, wot 'orrid langwidge! It's shock-in', blimy. Arter that y' ought to find me a match. Come on."

"Go t' 'ell!"

A lank, elderly man, who sat with his back to the wall, pushed up a battered tall hat from his eyes, and, producing a box of matches, exclaimed "Hell? And how far's that? You're in it!" He flung abroad a bony hand, and glanced upward. Over his forehead a greasy black curl dangled and shook, as he shuddered back against the wall. "My God, there can be no hell after this!"

"Ah," Kiddo Cook remarked, as he lit his pipe in the hollow of his hands, "that's a comfort, Mr. Beveridge, any 'ow." He returned the matches, and the old man, tilting his hat forward, was silent.

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A woman, gripping a shawl about her shoulders, came furtively along from the posts, with a man walking in her tracks—a little unsteadily. He was not of the Jago, but a decent young workman, by his dress. The sight took Kiddo Cook's idle eye, and when the couple had passed, he said meditatively: "There's Billy Leary in luck agin; 'is missis do pick 'em up s' 'elp me. I 'd carry the cosh meself if I 'd got a woman like 'er."

Cosh-carrying was near to being the major industry of the Jago. The cosh was a foot length of iron rod, with a knob at one end and a hook (or a ring) at the other. The craftsman, carrying it in his coat sleeve, waited about dark staircase corners till his wife (married or not) brought in a well-drunken stranger; when, with a sudden blow behind the head, the stranger was happily coshed, and whatever was found on him, as he lay insensible, was the profit on the transaction. In the hands of

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capable practitioners this industry yielded a comfortable subsistence for no great exertion. Most, of course, depended on the woman: whose duty it was to keep the other artist going in subjects. There were legends of surprising ingatherings achieved by wives of especial diligence: one of a woman who had brought to the cosh some six-and-twenty on a night of public rejoicing. This was, however, a story years old, and may have been no more than an exemplary fiction designed, like a Sunday School book, to convey a counsel of perfection to the dutiful matrons of the Old Jago.

The man and woman vanished in a doorway near the Jago Row end, where, for some reason, dossers were fewer than about the portal of Jago Court. There conversation flagged, and a broken snore was heard. It was a quiet night, as quietness was counted in the Jago; for it was too hot for most to fight in that stifling

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air—too hot to do more than turn on the stones and swear. Still, the last hoarse yelps of a combat of women came intermittently from Half Jago Street, in the further confines.

In a little while something large and dark was pushed forth from the door-opening near Jago Row, which Billy Leary's spouse had entered. The thing rolled over and lay tumbled on the pavement, for a time unnoticed. It might have been yet another would-be sleeper, but for its stillness. Just such a thing it seemed, belike, to two that lifted their heads and peered from a few yards off, till they rose on hands and knees and crept to where it lay—Jago rats, both. A man it was; with a thick smear across his face, and about his head the source of the dark trickle that sought the gutter deviously over the broken flags. The drab stuff of his pockets peeped out here and there in a crumpled bunch, and his waistcoat gaped where the

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watch-guard had been. Clearly, here was an uncommonly remunerative cosh—a cosh so good that the boots had been neglected, and remained on the man's feet. These the kneeling two unlaced deftly, and, rising, prize in hand, vanished in the deeper shadow of Jago Row.

A small boy, whom they met full tilt at the corner, staggered out to the gutter and flung a veteran curse after them. He was a slight child, by whose size you might have judged his age at five. But his face was of serious and troubled age. One who knew the children of the Jago, and could tell, might have held him eight, or from that to nine.

He replaced his hands in his trousers pockets and trudged up the street. As he brushed by the coshed man he glanced again toward Jago Row, and, jerking his thumb that way, "Done 'im for 'is boots," he piped. But nobody marked him till he reached Jago Court, when old Beveridge,

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pushing back his hat once more, called sweetly and silkily, "Dicky Perrott!" and beckoned with his finger.

The boy approached, and as he did so the man's skeleton hand suddenly shot out and gripped him by the collar. "It-never-does-to-see-too-much!" Beveridge said, in a series of shouts, close to the boy's ear. "Now go home," he added in a more ordinary tone, with a push to make his meaning plain: and straightway relapsed against the wall.

The boy scowled and backed off the pavement. His ragged jacket was coarsely made from one much larger, and he hitched the collar over his shoulder as he slunk toward a doorway some few yards on. Front doors were used merely as firewood in the Old Jago, and most had been burnt there many years ago. If, perchance, one could have been found still on its hinges it stood ever open, and probably would not shut. Thus at night the Jago doorways

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were a row of black holes, foul and forbidding.

Dicky Perrott entered his hole with caution, for anywhere, in the passage and on the stairs, somebody might be lying drunk, against whom it would be unsafe to stumble. He found nobody, however, and climbed and reckoned his way up the first stair-flight with the necessary regard for the treads that one might step through and the rails that had gone from the side. Then he pushed open the door of the first-floor back and was at home.

A little heap of guttering grease, not long ago a candle end, stood and spread on the mantel-piece, and gave irregular light from its drooping wick. A thin-railed iron bedstead, bent and staggering, stood against a wall, and on its murky coverings a half-dressed woman sat and neglected a baby that lay by her grieving and wheezing. The woman had a long dolorous face, empty of expression and weak of mouth.

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"Where 'a' you bin, Dicky?" she asked, rather complaining than asking. "It's sich low hours for a boy."

Dicky glanced about the room. "Got anythink to eat?" he asked.

"I dunno," she answered listlessly. "P'raps there's a bit o' bread in the cupboard. I do n't want nothin', its so 'ot. An father ain't been 'ome since tea-time."

The boy rummaged and found a crust. Gnawing at this he crossed to where the baby lay. "'Ullo, Looey," he said, bending and patting the muddy cheek. "'Ullo!"

The baby turned feebly on its back, and set up a thin wail. Its eyes were large and bright, its tiny face was piteously flea-bitten and strangely old. "Wy, she's 'ungry, mother," said Dicky Perrott, and took the little thing up.

He sat on a small box and rocked the baby on his knees, feeding it with morsels of chewed bread. The mother, dolefully inert, looked on and said: "She's that

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backward I'm quite wore out; more 'n ten months old an' don't even crawl yut. It 's a never-endin' trouble, is children."

She sighed, and presently stretched herself on the bed. The boy rose, and carrying his little sister with care, for she was dozing, essayed to look through the grimy window. The dull flush still spread overhead, but Jago Court lay darkling below, with scarce a sign of the ruinous back yards that edged it on this and the opposite sides, and nothing but blackness between.

The boy returned to his box, and sat. Then he said, "I do n't s'pose father's 'avin' a sleep outside, eh?"

The woman sat up with some show of energy. "Wot?" she said sharply. "Sleep out in the street like them low Ranns an' Learys? I should 'ope not. It 's bad enough livin' 'ere at all an' me being used to different things once, an' all. You ain't seen 'im outside 'ave ye?"

"No, I ain't seen 'im; I jist looked in

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the court." Then after a pause, "I 'ope 'e's done a click," the boy said.

His mother winced. "I dunno wot you mean, Dicky," she said, but falteringly. "You—you 're gittin' that low an' an'—"

"Wy, copped somethink, o' course. Nicked somethink. You know."

"If you say sich things as that I'll tell 'im wot you say, an' 'e 'll pay you. We ain't that sort o' people, Dicky, you ought to know. I was alwis kep' respectable an' straight all my life, I'm sure, an'—"

"I know. You said so before, to father—I 'eard: wen 'e brought 'ome that there yuller prop—the necktie pin. Wy, where did 'e git that? 'E ain't 'ad a job for munse an' munse; where's the yan-nups come from wot's bin for to pay the rent, an' git the toke, an' milk for Looey? Think I dunno? I ain't a kid; I know."

"Dicky, Dicky! you must n't say sich things!" was all the mother could

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find to say, with tears in her slack eyes. "It's wicked an'—an' low. An' you must alwis be respectable an' straight, Dicky, an' you'll get on then."

"Straight people's fools, I reckon. Kiddo Cook says that, an' 'e's as wide as Broad Street. Wen I grow up I'm goin' to git toff's cloe's an' be in the 'igh mob. They does big clicks."

"They git put in a dark prison for years an' years, Dicky,—an'—an' if you're sich a wicked low boy, father'll give you the strap—'ard," the mother returned, with what earnestness she might. "Gimme the baby an' you go to bed; go on, 'fore father comes."

Dicky handed over the baby, whose wizen face was now relaxed in sleep, and slowly disencumbered himself of the ungainly jacket, staring at the wall in a brown study. "It's the mugs wot git took," he said, absently. "An' quoddin ain't so bad." Then, after a pause, he turned and

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added suddenly : "S'pose father'll be smuggled some day, eh, mother ?"

His mother made no reply, but bent languidly over the baby with an indefinite pretence of settling it in a place on the bed. Soon Dicky himself, in the short and ragged shirt he had worn under the jacket, burrowed head first among the dingy coverings at the foot, and protruding his head at the further side took his accustomed place crosswise at the extreme end.

The filthy ceiling lit and darkened by fits as the candle-wick fell and guttered to its end. He heard his mother rise and find another fragment of candle to light by its expiring flame, but he lay still wakeful. After a time he asked : "Mother, why do n't you come to bed ?"

"Waiting for father. Go to sleep."

He was silent for a little. But brain and eyes were wide awake, and soon he spoke again. "Them noo 'uns in the

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front room," he said. "Ain't the man give 'is wife a 'idin'yut?"

"No."

"Nor yut the boy—'umpty-backed un?"

"No."

"Seems they 're mighty pertickler. Fancy theirselves too good for their neighbours; I 'eard Pigeony Poll say that; on'y Poll said"—

"You must n't never listen to Pigeony Poll, Dicky. Ain't you 'eard me say so? Go to sleep. 'Ere comes father."

There was, indeed, a step on the stairs, but it passed the landing and went on to the top floor. Dicky lay awake, but silent, gazing upward and back through the dirty window just over his head. It was very hot, and he fidgeted uncomfortably, fearing to turn or toss lest the baby should wake and cry. There came a change in the hue of the sky, and he watched the patch within his view, until the red seemed to

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gather in spots and fade a spot at a time. Then at last there was a tread on the stairs that stayed at the door, and father had come home. Dicky lay still, and listened.

“Lor, Josh, where ye bin?” Dicky heard his mother say. “I ’m almost wore out a-waitin’.”

“Awright, awright” — this in a hoarse grunt, little above a whisper — “Got any water up ’ere? Wash this ’ere stick.”

There was a pause, wherein Dicky knew his mother looked about her in vacant doubt as to whether or not water was in the room. Then a quick, under-toned scream, and the stick rattled heavily on the floor. “It ’s sticky!” his mother said. “O, my Gawd, Josh, look at that — an’ bits o’ ’air, too!” The great shadow of an open hand shot up across the ceiling, and fell again. “O, Josh! O, my Gawd! You ain’t, ’ave ye? Not — not — not that?”

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“Not wot? Gawblimy, not wot? Shutter mouth. If a man fights you ’re got to fight back, ain’cher? Anyone ’ud think it was a murder, to look at ye. I ain’t sich a damn fool as that. ’Ere, pull up that board.”

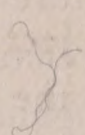
Dicky knew the loose floor-board that was lifted with a slight groaning jar. It was to the right of the hearth, and he had shammed sleep when it had been lifted once before. His mother whimpered and cried quietly. “You ’ll git in trouble, Josh,” she said. “I wish you ’d git a reg’lar job, Josh, like wot you used—I do—I do.”

The board was shut down again. Dicky Perrott, through one opened eye, saw the sky, a pale grey above, and hoped the click had been a good one; hoped also that it might bring bullock’s liver for dinner.

. . . Out in the Jago the pale dawn brought a cooler air and the chance of sleep. From the paving of Old Jago Street sad

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grey faces, open-mouthed, looked upward as from the Valley of Dry Bones. Down by Jago Row the coshed subject, with the blood dry on his face, felt the colder air and moved a leg.



II

Three quarters of a mile east of the Jago's outermost limit was the East End Elevation Mission and Pansophical Institute: such was the amazing success whereof, that a new wing had been built, and was now to be declared open by a Bishop of great eminence and industry.

The triumphs of the East End Elevation Mission and Pansophical Institute were known and appreciated far from East London, by people who knew less of that part than of Asia Minor. Indeed, they were chiefly appreciated by these. There were kept, perpetually on tap for the aspiring East Ender, the Higher Life, the Greater Thought, and the Wider Humanity: with other radiant abstractions, mostly in the comparative degree; specifics all for the manufacture of the Superior

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Person. There were many Lectures given on still more subjects. Pictures were borrowed and shewn, with revelations to the Uninformed of the morals ingeniously concealed by the painters. The Uninformed were also encouraged to debate and to produce papers on literary and political matters, while still unencumbered with the smallest knowledge thereof: for the Enlargement of the Understanding and the Embellishment of the Intellect. And there were classes, and clubs, and newspapers, and games of draughts, and musical evenings, and a brass band, whereby the life of the Hopeless Poor might be coloured, and the Misery of the Submerged alleviated. The wretches who crowded to these benefits were tradesmen's sons, small shopkeepers and their families, and neat clerks, with here and there a smart young artisan of one of the especially respectable trades. They freely patronised the clubs, the musical evenings,

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the brass band, and the bagatelle board; and those who took themselves seriously debated and Mutually-Improved with pomp. Others, subject to savage fits of wanting-to-know, made short rushes at random evening classes, with intervals of disgusted apathy. Altogether, a number of decently-dressed and mannerly young men passed many evenings at the Pan-sophical Institute in harmless pleasures, and often with an agreeable illusion of intellectual advance.

Other young men, more fortunately circumstanced, with the educational varnish fresh and raw upon them, came from afar, equipped with a foreign mode of thought and a proper ignorance of the world and the proportions of things, as Missionaries. Not without some anxiety to their parents, they plunged into the perilous deeps of the East End, to struggle—for a fortnight—with its suffering and its brutishness. So they went among the tradesmen's sons

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and the shopmen, who endured them as they endured the nominal subscription; and they came away with a certain relief, and with some misgiving as to what impression they had made, and what they had done to make it. But it was with knowledge and authority that they went back among those who had doubted their personal safety in the dark region. The East End, they reported, was nothing like what it was said to be. You could see much worse places up West. The people were quite a decent sort, in their way: shocking Bounders, of course, but quite clean and quiet, and very comfortably dressed, with ties and collars and watches.

But the Missionaries were few, and the subscribers to the Elevation Mission were many. Most had been convinced, by what they had been told, by what they had read in charity appeals, and perhaps by what they had seen in police-court and inquest reports, that the whole East End

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was a wilderness of slums; slums packed with starving human organisms, without minds and without morals, preying on each other alive. These subscribers visited the Institute by twos and threes, on occasions of particular festivity among the neat clerks, and were astonished at the wonderful effects of Pansophic Elevation on the degraded classes, their aspect and their habits. Perhaps it was a concert where nobody was drunk; perhaps a little dance, where nobody howled a chorus, nor wore his hat, nor punched his partner in the eye. It was a great marvel, whereunto the observers testified: so that more subscriptions came, and the new wing was built.

The afternoon was bright, and all was promising. A small crowd of idlers hung about the main door of the Institute and stared at a string of flags. Away to the left stood the new wing, a face of fair, clean brick; the ornamentation, of approved earnestness, in terra-cotta squares at regu-

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lar intervals. Within sat many friends and relations of the shopmen and superior mechanics, and waited for the Bishop, the Eminences of the Elevation Mission sitting apart on the platform. Without, among the idlers, waited Dicky Perrott. His notions of what was going on were indistinct; but he had a belief, imbibed through rumour and tradition, that all celebrations at such large buildings were accompanied by the consumption, in the innermost recesses, of cake and tea. Even to be near cake was something. In Shoreditch High Street was a shop where cake stood in the window in great slabs, one slab over another, to an incalculable value. At this window—against it, as near as possible, his face flattened white—Dickey would stand till the shop-keeper drove him off; till he had but to shut his eyes to see once more, in the shifting black, the rich yellow sections with their myriad raisins. Once a careless errand boy, who had bought a

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slice, took so clumsy a bite as he emerged that near a third of the whole piece broke and fell; and this Dickey had snatched from the paving and bolted with ere the owner quite saw his loss. This was a superior sort of cake, at a penny. But once he had managed to buy himself a slice of an inferior sort for a half-penny in Meakin Street

Dicky Perrott, these blessed memories in his brain, stood unobtrusively near the door, with the big jacket buttoned over as decently as might be, full of a desperate design: which was to get inside by whatsoever manner of trick or opportunity he might, and so, if it were humanly possible, to the cake.

The tickets were being taken at the door by an ardent young Elevator — one of the Missionaries. Him, and all such washed and well-dressed people, Dicky had learnt to hold in serene contempt when the business in hand was dodging. There

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was no hurry : the Elevator might waste his vigilance on the ticket-holders for some time yet ; and Dicky knew better than to betray the smallest sign of a desire for entrance while his enemy's attention was awake.

Carriages drew up, and yielded more Eminences : toward the end the Bishop himself, whom Dicky observed but as a pleasant-looking old gentleman in uncommon clothes ; and on whom he bestowed no more thought than a passing wonder at what might be the accident to his hat which had necessitated its repair with string.

But at the spikes of the Bishop's carriage came another, and out of that there got three ladies, friends of the ticket receiver, on whom they closed, greeting and shaking hands ; and in a flash Dicky Perrott was beyond the lobby and moving obscurely along the walls of the inner hall, behind pillars and in shadow, seeking cake.

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The Choral Society sang their lustiest, and there were speeches. Eminences expressed their surprise and delight at finding the people of the East End gathered in the Institute Building, so respectable and clean, thanks to persistent, indefatigable, unselfish Elevation.

The good Bishop, amid clapping of hands and fluttering of handkerchiefs, piped cherubically of everything. He rejoiced to see that day, whereon the helping hand of the West was so unmistakably made apparent in the East. He rejoiced also to find himself in the midst of so admirably typical an assemblage — so representative, if he might say so, of that great East End of London, thirsting and crying out for — for Elevation; for that — ah — Elevation which the more fortunately circumstanced denizens of—of other places, had so munificently—laid on. The people of the East End had been sadly misrepresented—in popular periodicals and in—in other ways.

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The East End, he was convinced, was not so black as it was painted (applause). He had but to look about him—et cetera, et cetera. He questioned whether so well-conducted, morally-given and respectable a gathering could be brought together in any West End parish with which he was acquainted. It was his most pleasant duty on this occasion—and so on and so forth.

Dicky Perrott had found the cake. It was in a much smaller room at the back of the hall, wherein it was expected that the Bishop and certain Eminences of the platform would refresh themselves with tea after the ceremony. There were heavy drooping curtains at the door of this room, and deep from the largest folds the ratling from the Jago watched. The table was guarded by a sour-faced man—just such a man as drove him from the window of the cake-shop in Shoreditch High Street. Nobody else was there yet, and plainly the sour-faced man must be

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absent or busy ere the cake could be got at.

There was a burst of applause in the hall; the new wing had been declared open. Then there was more singing, and after that much shuffling and tramping, for everybody was free to survey the new rooms on the way out; and the Importances from the platform came to find the tea.

Filling the room and standing about in little groups; chatting, munching and sipping, while the sour-faced man distractedly floundered amid crockery; not a soul of them all perceived an inconsiderable small boy, ducking and dodging vaguely among legs and 'round skirts, making, from time to time, a silent snatch at a plate on the table; and presently he vanished altogether. Then the amiable bishop, beaming over the tea-cup six inches from his chin, at two courtiers of the clergy, bethought him of a dinner engagement, and passed his hand downward over the rotundity of his waistcoat.

“Dear, dear,” said the Bishop, glancing

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down suddenly, "why — what's become of my watch?"

There hung three inches of black ribbon, with a cut end. The bishop looked blankly at the Elevators about him.

Three streets off, Dicky Perrott, with his shut fist deep in his breeches pocket, and a gold watch in the fist, ran full drive for the Old Jago.

III

There was nobody in chase ; but Dicky Perrott, excited by his novel exploit, ran hard ; forgetting the lesson first learnt by every child of the Jago, to avoid, as far as may be, suspicious flight in open streets. He burst into the Old Jago from the Jago Row corner, by Meakin Street, and still he ran. A small boy a trifle bigger than himself made a sharp punch at him as he passed, but he took no heed. The hulking group at the corner of Old Jago Street, ever observant of weaklings with plunder, saw him and one tried to catch his arm, but he had the wit to dodge. Past the Jago Court passage he scudded, in at the familiar doorway and up the stairs. A pale hunchbacked child, clean and wistful, descended and him Dicky

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flung aside and half downstairs with "Git out, 'ump!"

Josh Perrott sat on the bed, eating fried fish from an oily paper; for it was tea-time. He was a man of thirty-two, of middle height and stoutly built, with a hard, leathery face as of one much older. The hair about his mouth seemed always three days old — never much less nor much more. He was a plasterer—had, at least, so described himself at police-courts. But it was long since he had plastered, though he still walked abroad splashed and speckled, as though from an eruption of inherent plaster. In moments of pride he declared himself the only member of his family who had ever learned a trade and worked at it. It was a long relinquished habit, but while it lasted he had married a decent boilermaker's daughter, who had known nothing of the Jago till these latter days. One other boast Josh Perrott had: that nothing but shot or pointed steel could

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hurt him. And this, too, was near being a true boast; as he had proved in more than one fight in the local arena—which was Jago Court. Now he sat peaceably on the edge of the bed and plucked with his fingers at the oily fish, while his wife grubbed hopelessly about the cupboard-shelves for the screw of paper which was the sugar-basin.

Dicky entered at a burst. “Mother—father—look! I done a click! I got a clock—a red ’un!”

Josh Perrott stopped, jaw and hand, with a pinch of fish poised in air. The woman turned, and her chin fell. “O Dicky, Dicky,” she cried, in real distress, “you ’re a awful low, wicked boy. My Gawd, Josh ’e—’e ’ll grow up bad; I said so.”

Josh Perrott bolted the pinch of fish, and sucked his fingers as he sprang to the door. After a quick glance down the stairs, he shut it and turned to Dicky.

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‘Where d’ je get that, ye young devel?’ he asked, and snatched the watch.

“Claimed it auf a ol’ bloke w’en ’e was drinkin’ ’is tea,” Dicky replied with sparkling eyes. “Let’s ’ave a look at it, father.”

“Did ’e run after ye?”

“No—did n’t know nuffin about it. I cut ’is bit o’ ribbin with my knife.” Dicky held up a treasured relic of blade and handle found in a gutter. “Ain’tcher goin’ to let’s ’ave a look at it?”

Josh Perrott looked doubtfully toward his wife: the children were chiefly her concern. Of her sentiments there could be no mistake. He slipped the watch into his own pocket and caught Dicky by the collar.

“I’ll give you somethink, you dam young thief,” he exclaimed, slipping off his belt. “You’d like t’ ’ave us all in stir for a year or two, I s’pose; goin’ thievin’

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watches like a growed-up man." And he plied the belt savagely, while Dicky, amazed, breathless and choking, spun about him with piteous squeals, and the baby woke and puled in feeble sympathy.

There was a rip, and the collar began to leave the old jacket. Feeling this, Josh Perrott released it and with a quick drive of the fist in the neck, sent Dicky staggering across the room. Dicky caught at the bed-frame, and limped out to the landing, sobbing grievously in the bend of his sleeve.

It was more than his mother had intended but she knew better than to attempt interference. Now that he was gone she said, with some hesitation: "'Ad n't you better take it out at once, Josh?"

"Yes, I 'm goin'," Josh replied, turning the watch in his hand. "It 's a good 'un—a topper."

"You—you won't let Weech 'ave it, will ye, Josh? 'E—'e never gives much."

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“No bloomin’ fear. I’m goin’ up ’Oxton wi’ this ’ere.”

Dicky sobbed his way down the stairs and through the passage to the back. In the yard he looked for Tommy Rann to sympathise, but Tommy was not; and Dicky paused in his grief to reflect that perhaps, indeed, in the light of calm reason, he would rather cast the story of the watch in a more heroic mould for Tommy’s benefit than was compatible with tears and a belted back. So he turned and squeezed through a hole in the broken fence, sobbing again, in search of the friend that shared his inmost sorrows.

The belting was bad—very bad. There was broken skin on his shins where the strap had curled ’round, and there was a little sticky blood under the shirt half way up his back: to say nothing of bruises. But it was the hopeless injustice of things that shook him to the soul. Wholly un-

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aided, he had done, with neatness and credit, a click that anybody in the Jago would have been proud of. Overjoyed, he had hastened to receive the commendations of his father and mother, and to place the prize in their hands, freely and generously, though perhaps with some hope of hot supper by way of celebration. And his reward was this. Why? He could understand nothing; could but feel the wrong that broke his heart. And so, sobbing, he crawled through two fences to weep on the shaggy neck of Jerry Gullen's canary.

Jerry Gullen's canary was no bird, but a donkey; employed by Jerry Gullen in his occasional intervals of sobriety to drag a cranky shallow, sometimes stored with glass bottles, rags, and hearthstone; sometimes with firewood manufactured from a convenient hoarding, or from the joinery of an empty house; sometimes with empty sacks covering miscellaneous property sud-

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denly acquired and not for general inspection. His vacations, many and long, Jerry Gullen's canary spent, forgotten and unfed, in Jerry Gullen's backyard: gnawing desperately at fences and harrowing the neighborhood with his brays. Thus the nickname, facetiously applied by Kiddo Cook in celebration of his piteous song, grew into use; and "Canary" would call the creature's attention as readily as a mouthful of imprecations.

Jerry Gullen's canary was gnawing, gnawing, with a sound as of a crooked centre-bit. Everywhere about the foul yard, ten or twelve feet square, wood was rounded and splintered and bitten white, and, as the donkey turned his heavy head, a drip of blood from his gums made a disc on the stones. A twitch of the ears welcomed Dicky, grief-stricken as he was; for it was commonly thus that he bethought him of solace in Jerry Gullen's backyard.

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And so Dicky, his arms about the mangy neck, told the tale of his wrongs till consolation came in composition of the heroic narrative designed for Tommy Rann.

“O, Canary, it is a blasted shame !”

IV

When Dicky Perrott came running into Jago Row with the Bishop's watch in his pocket, another boy punched a fist at him, and at the time Dicky was at a loss to guess the cause — unless it were a simple caprice — but stayed neither to enquire nor to retaliate. The fact was that the Ranns and the Learys were coming out, fighting was in the air, and the small boy, meeting another a trifle smaller, punched on general principles. The Ranns and the Learys, ever at war or in guarded armistice, were the great rival families — the Montagues and the Capulets — of the Old Jago. The Learys, indeed, scarce pretended to rivalry — rather to factious opposition. For the Ranns gloried in the style and title of the “Royal Family.” and dominated the

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Jago ; but there were mighty fighters, men and women, among the Learys, and when a combat arose it was a hard one and an animated. The two families ramified throughout the Jago, and under the Rann standard, whether by kin or by custom, were the Gullens, the Fishers, the Spicers, and the Walshes ; while in the Leary train came Dawsons, Greens, and Harnwells. So that near all the Jago was wont to be on one side or the other, and any of the Jago which was not was apt to be the worse for it, for the Ranns drubbed all them that were not of their faction in the most thorough and most workmanlike manner, and the Learys held by the same practice ; so that neutrality meant double drubbing. But when the Ranns and Learys combined, and the Old Jago issued forth in its entire might against Dove Lane, then the battle was one to go miles to see.

This, however, was but a Rann and Leary fight ; and it was but in its early stages

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when Dicky Perrott, emerging from Jerry Gullen's back yard, made for Shoreditch High Street by way of the "Posties"—the passage with posts at the end of Old Jago Street. His purpose was to snatch a handful of hay from some passing wagon, or of mixed fodder from some unguarded nosebag, wherewith to reward the sympathy of Jerry Gullen's canary. But by the "Posties," at the Edge Lane corner, Tommy Rann, capless and with a purple bump on his forehead, came flying into his arms, breathless, exultant, a babbling braggart. He had fought Johnny Leary and Joe Dawson, he said, one after the other, and pretty nigh broke Johnny Leary's blasted neck; and Joe Dawson's big brother was after him now with a bleed'n' shovel. So the two children ran on together and sought the seclusion of their own back yard, where the story of Tommy Rann's prowess, with scowls and the pounding of imaginary foes, and the story

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of the Bishop's watch, with suppressions and improvements, mingled and contended in the thickening dusk; and Jerry Gullen's canary went forgotten and unrequited.

That night fighting was sporadic and desultory in the Jago. Bob the Bender was reported to have a smashed nose, and Sam Cash had his head bandaged at the hospital. At the Bag of Nails in Edge Lane, Snob Spicer was knocked out of knowledge with a quart pot, and Cocko Harnwell's missis had a piece bitten off of one ear. As the night wore on, taunts and defiances were bandied from window to door and from door to window, between those who intended to begin fighting to-morrow; and shouts from divers corners gave notice of isolated scuffles. Once a succession of piercing screams seemed to betoken that Sally Green had begun. There was a note in the screams of Sally Green's opposites which the Jago had learned to recognize. Sally Green, though of the weaker faction, was the female cham-

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pion of the Old Jago: an eminence won and kept by fighting tactics peculiar to herself. For it was her way, reserving teeth and nails, to wrestle closely with her antagonist, throw her by a dexterous twist on her face, and fall on her, instantly seizing the victim's nape in her teeth, gnawing and worrying. The sufferer's screams were audible afar, and beyond their invariable eccentricity of quality—a quality vaguely suggestive of dire surprise—they had a mechanical persistence, a pumplike regularity, that distinguished them, in the accustomed ear, from other screams.

Josh Perrott had not been home all the evening; probably the Bishop's watch was in course of transmutation into beer. Dicky, stiff and domestically inclined, nursed Looley and listened to the noises without till he fell asleep, in hopeful anticipation of the morrow. For Tommy Rann had promised him half of a broken iron railing wherewith to fight the Learys.

V

Sleep in the Jago was at best a thing of intermission, for reasons—reasons of multitude—already denoted; nevertheless, Dicky slept well enough to be unconscious of his father's home-coming. In the morning, however, there lay Josh Perrott, snoring thunderously on the floor, pie-bald with road-dust. This was not a morning whereon father would want breakfast, it was plain; he would wake thirsty and savage. So Dicky made sure of a crust from the cupboard and betook himself in search of Tommy Rann. As to washing, he was never especially fond of it, and in any case there were fifty excellent excuses for neglect. The only water was that from the little tap in the back yard. The little tap

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was usually out of order or had been stolen bodily by a tenant, and if it were not, there was no basin there, nor any soap, nor towel; and anything savouring of moderate cleanliness was resented in the Jago as an assumption of superiority.

Fighting began early, fast and furious. The Ranns got together soon, and hunted the Learys up and down, and attacked them in their houses, the Learys' chances only coming when straggling Ranns were cut off from the main body. The weapons in use, as was customary, rose in effectiveness by a swiftly ascending scale. The Learys, assailed with sticks, replied with sticks, torn from old packing-cases, with protruding nails. The two sides bethought them of coshes simultaneously, and such as had no coshes—very few—had pokers and iron railings. Ginger Stagg, at bay in his passage, laid open Pud Palmer's cheek with a chisel; and knives thus happily legitimised, with the least possible prelimi-

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nary form, everybody was free to lay hold of whatever came handy.

In Old Jago Street, half-way between Jago Court and Edge Lane, stood the Feathers, the grimmest and vilest of the four public-houses in the Jago. Into the Feathers some dozen Learys were driven, and for a while they held the inner bar and the tap-room against the Ranns, who swarmed after them, chairs, bottles and pewter pots flying thick, while Mother Gapp, the landlady, hung hysterical on the beer pulls in the bar, supplicating and blubbering aloud. Then a partition came down with a crash, bringing shelves and many glasses with it, and the Ranns rushed over the ruin, beating the Learys down, jumping on them, heaving them through the back windows. Having thus cleared the house of the intruding enemy, the Ranns demanded recompense of liquor, and took it, dragging handles off beer engines, seizing bottles, breaking into the

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cellar and driving in bungs. Nobody better than Mother Gapp could quell an ordinary bar riot, even to knocking a man down with a pot, but she knew better than to attempt interference now. Nothing could have made her swoon but she sat limp and helpless, weeping and blaspheming.

The Ranns cleared off, every man with a bottle or so, and scattered, and this for awhile was their undoing. For the Learys rallied and hunted the Ranns in their turn; a crowd of eighty or a hundred sweeping the Jago from Honey Lane to Meakin Street. Then they swung back through Edge Lane to Old Jago Street and made for Jerry Gullen's—a house full of Ranns. Jerry Gullen, Bill Rann and the rest took refuge in the upper floors and barricaded the stairs. Below, the Learys broke windows and ravaged the rooms, smashing whatsoever of furniture was to be found. Above, Pip Walsh, who affected horticult-

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ture on his window-sill, hurled down flower pots. On the stairs, Billy Leary, scaling the barricade, was flung from top to bottom, and had to be carried home. And then Pip Walsh's missis scattered the besiegers on the pavement below with a kettle-full of boiling water.

There was a sudden sortie of Ranns from Jago Court, but it profited nothing: for the party was small, and, its advent being unexpected, there was a lack of prompt co-operation from the house. The Learys held the field.

Down the middle of Old Jago Street came Sally Green: red-faced, stripped to the waist, dancing, hoarse and triumphant. Nail-scores wide as the finger striped her back, her face, and her throat, and she had a black eye; but in one great hand she dangled a long bunch of clotted hair, as she whooped defiance to the Jago. It was a trophy newly rent from the scalp of Norah Walsh, champion of the Rann

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womankind, who had crawled away to hide her blighted head, and be restored with gin. None answered Sally's challenge, and, staying but to fling a brickbat at Pip Walsh's window, she carried her dance and her trophy into Edge Lane.

The scrimmage on Jerry Gullen's stairs was thundering anew, and parties of Learys were making for other houses in the street, when there came a volley of yells from Jago Row, heralding a scudding mob of Ranns. The defeated sortie-party from Jago Court, driven back, had gained New Jago Street by way of the house passages behind the court and set to gathering the scattered faction. Now the Ranns came, drunk, semi-drunk and otherwise, and the Learys, leaving Jerry Gullen's, rushed to meet them. There was a great shock, hats flew, sticks and heads made a wooden rattle, and instantly the two mobs were broken into an uproarious confusion of tangled groups, howling and grappling.

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Here a man crawled into a passage to nurse a broken head; there a knot gathered to kick a sprawling foe. So the fight thinned out and spread, resolving into many independent combats with concerted rushes of less and less frequency, till once again all through the Jago each fought for his own hand. Kiddo Cook, joker always, ran hilariously through the streets, brandishing a long roll of twisted paper, where-with he smacked the heads of Learys all and sundry, who realised too late that the paper was twisted round a lodging-house poker.

Now, of the few neutral Jagos, most lay low. Josh Perrott, however, hard as nails and respected for it, feared neither Rann nor Leary, and leaving a little money with his missis, carried his morning mouth in search of beer. Pigeony Poll, harlot and outcast, despised for that she neither fought nor kept a cosh-carrier, like a respectable married woman, slunk and

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trembled in corners and yards and wept at the sight of bleeding heads. As for old Beveridge, the affair so grossly excited him that he neglected business (he cadged and wrote begging screeves) and stayed in the Jago; where he strode wildly about the streets, lank and rusty, stabbing the air with a carving knife, and incoherently defying "all the lot" to come near him. Nobody did.

Dicky Perrott and Tommy Rann found a snug fastness in Jago Row. For there was a fence with a loose board, which, pushed aside, revealed a hole where-through a very small boy might squeeze; and within were stored many barrows and shallows, mostly broken, and of these one, tilted forward and bottom up, made a hut or den, screened about with fence and barrows. Here they hid while the Learys swept the Jago, and hence they issued from time to time to pound such youngsters of the other side as might come in sight. The bits of

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iron railing made imposing weapons, but were a trifle too big and heavy for rapid use in their puny hands. Still, Dicky managed to double up little Billy Leary with a timely lunge in the stomach, and Tommy Rann made Bobby Harnwell's nose bleed very satisfactorily. On the other hand, the bump on Tommy Rann's forehead was widened by the visitation of a stick, and Dicky Perrott sustained a very hopeful punch in the eye, which he cherished enthusiastically, with a view to an honourable blackness. In the snuggery intervals they explained their prowess one to another, and Dicky alluded to his intention, when he was a man, to buy a very long sword wherewith to cut off the Leary's heads; Tommy Rann inclining, however, to a gun, with which one might also shoot birds.

The battle flagged a little toward mid-day, but waxed lively again as the afternoon began. It was then that Dicky Per-

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rott, venturing some way from the retreat, found himself in a scrimmage, and a man snatched away his piece of iron and floored a Leary with it. Gratifying as was the distinction of aiding in the exploit, Dicky mourned the loss of the weapon, almost unto tears; and Tommy Rann would not go turn about with the other, but kept it wholly for himself: so Dicky was fain sorrowfully to hunt for a mere stick. Even a disengaged stick was not easy to find just then. So Dicky, emerging from the Jago, tried Meakin Street, where there were shops, but unsuccessfully; and so came round by Luck Row, a narrow way from Meakin Street, by Walker's cook-shop, up through the Jago.

Dicky's mother, left with the baby, fastened the door as well as she might, and trembled. Indeed she had reason. The time of Josh Perrott's return was a matter of doubt, but when he did come he

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would want something to eat; it was for that he had left the money. But Dicky was out and there was nothing in the cupboard. From the windows she saw divers fights in Jago Court; and a man lay for near two hours on the stones with a cut on his temple. As for herself, she was no favorite in the neighbourhood at any time. For one thing, her husband did not carry the cosh. Then she was an alien who had never entirely fallen into Jago ways; she had soon grown sluttish and dirty, but she was never drunk, she never quarrelled, she did not gossip freely. Also her husband beat her but rarely, and then not with a chair or a poker. Justly irritated by such superiorities as these, the women of the Jago were ill disposed to brook another; which was that Hannah Perrott had been married in church. For these reasons she was timid at the most peaceful of times, but now, with Ranns and Learys on the war-path, and herself obnoxious to both,

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she trembled. She wished Dicky would come and do her errand. But there was no sign of him, and mid-day wore into afternoon. It was late for Josh as it was, and he would be sure to come home irritable—it was his way when a bad head from overnight struggled with morning beer. If he found nothing to eat there would be trouble.

At length she resolved to go herself. There was a lull in the outer din, and what there was seemed to come from the further parts of Honey Lane and Jago Row. She would slip across by Luck Row to Meakin Street, and be back in five minutes. She took up little Looey, went.

As Dicky, stickless, turned into Luck Row, there arose a loud shriek and then another, and then, in a changed voice a succession of long screams, with a regular breath-pause. Sally Green again!

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He ran, turned into Old Jago Street, and saw.

Sprawled on her face in the vile roadway lay a writhing woman and screamed, while squeezed under her arm was a baby with mud in its eyes and a cut cheek, crying weakly; and spread over all, clutching her prey by hair and wrist, Sally Green hung on the nape like a terrier, jaws clenched, head shaking.

Thus Dicky saw it in a flash, and in an instant he had flung himself on Sally Green, kicking, striking, biting and crying, for he had seen his mother and Looey. The kicks wasted themselves among the woman's petticoats and the blows were feeble, but the sharp teeth were meeting in the shoulder-flesh when help came.

Norah Walsh, vanquished champion, now somewhat recovered, looked from a window, saw her enemy vulnerable, and ran out, armed with a bottle. She stopped

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at the kerb to knock the bottom off the bottle, and then with an exultant shout seized Sally Green by the hair and stabbed her about the face with the jagged points. Blinded with blood, Sally released her hold on Mrs. Perrott and rolled on her back, struggling fiercely; but to no end, for Norah Walsh, kneeling on her breast, stabbed and stabbed again, till pieces of the bottle broke away. Sally's yells and plunges ceased, and a man pulled Norah off. On him she turned, and he was fain to run, while certain Learys found a truck which might carry Sally to the hospital.

Hannah Perrott was gone indoors, hysterical and helpless. She had scarce crossed the street on her errand when she had met Sally Green, in quest of female Ranns. Mrs. Perrott was not a Rann, but she was not a Leary, so it came to the same thing. Moreover, there was her general obnoxiousness. She had tried to run, but that was useless; and now, sobbing

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and bleeding, she was merely conscious of being gently led—almost carried—indoors and upstairs. She was laid back on the bed, and somebody loosened her hair and wiped her face and neck, giving her hoarse, comforting words. Then she saw the face—scared though coarse and pitted, and red about the eyes—that bent over her. It was Pigeony Poll's.

Dicky had followed her in, no longer the hero of the Jago Row retreat, but his face tearful and distorted, carrying the baby in his arms and wiping the mud from her eyes. Now he sat on the little box and continued his ministrations, with fear in his looks, as he glanced at his mother on the bed.

Without, the fight rallied once more. The Learys ran to avenge Sally Green, and the Ranns to meet them with a will. Down by the bag of Nails a party of Ranns were driven between the posts and

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through the gut into Shoreditch High Street, where a stand was made until Fag Dawson dropped with a shoemaker's knife sticking under his armpit. Then the Ranns left, with most of the Learys after them, and Fag Dawson was carried to a chemist's by the police, never to floor a Rann again. For he was chived in the left lung.

Thus the fight ended. For a faction fight in the Jago, with a few broken heads and ribs and an odd knife wound here and there—even with a death in the hospital from kicks or what not—was all very well; but when it came to homicide in the open High Street the police drew the line and entered the Jago in force. Ordinarily, a peep between the “Posties” was all the supervision the Jago had, although three policemen had been seen to walk the length of Old Jago Street together; and their were raids in force for special captures.

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There was a raid in force now, and the turmoil ceased. Nothing would have pleased both Ranns and Learys better than to knock over two or three policemen, for kicking practice; but there were too many for the sport, and for hours they patrolled the Jago's closest passages. Of course nobody knew who chived Fag Dawson. No enquiring policeman ever found anybody in the Old Jago who knew anything, even to the harm of his bitterest foe. It was the sole commandment that ran there: "Thou shalt not nark."

That night it was known that there would be a fight between Josh Perrott and Billy Leary, once the latter grew well. For Josh Perrott came home, saw his wife, and turned Rann on the spot. But for the police in the Jago that night, there would have been many a sore head, if no worse, among the Learys by visitation of Josh Perrott. Sally Green's husband had fled years ago, and Billy Leary,

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her brother, was the obvious mark for Josh's vengeance. He was near as eminent a fighter among the men as his sister among the women, and a charming scrap was anticipated. It would come off, of course, in Jago Court one Sunday morning, as all fights of distinction did, and perhaps somebody in the High Mob would put up stakes.

VI

In the morning the police still held the Jago. Their presence embarrassed many, but none more than Dicky Perrott, who would always take a turning, or walk the other way, at sight of a policeman. Dicky got out of Old Jago Street early, and betook him to Meakin Street, where there were chandler's shops with sugar in their windows, and cook-shops with pudding. He designed working through by these to Shoreditch High Street, there to crown his solace by contemplation of the cake-shop. But, as he neared Weech's coffee-shop, scarce half through Meakin Street, there stood Weech himself at the door, grinning and nodding affably, and beckoning him. He was a pleasant man, this Mr. Aaron Weech, who sang hymns aloud in the

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back-parlour and hummed the tunes in the shop. A prosperous, white-aproned, whiskered, half-bald, smirking tradesman, who bent and spoke amiably to boys, looking sharply in their eyes, but talked to a man mostly with his gaze on the man's waist-coat.

Indeed, there seemed to be something about Mr. Aaron Weech especially attractive to youth. Nearly all his customers were boys and girls, though not boys and girls who looked likely to pay a great deal in the way of refreshment, much as they took. But he was ever indulgent and at all times accessible to his young clients. Even on Sunday (though, of course, his shutters were kept rigidly up on the Day of Rest) a particular tap would bring him hot-foot to the door; not to sell coffee, for Mr. Weech was no Sabbath-breaker.

Now he stood at his door, and invited Dicky with nods and becks. Dicky, all

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wondering, and alert to dodge in case the thing were a mere device to bring him within striking distance, went.

“W’y, Dicky Perrott,” quoth Mr. Weech in a tone of genial surprise, “I b’lieve you could drink a cup o’ cawfy!”

Dicky, wondering how Mr. Weech had learnt his name, believed he could.

“An’ eat a slice o’ cake, too, I’ll be bound,” Mr. Weech added.

Dicky’s glance leapt. Yes, he could eat a slice of cake, too.

“Ah, I knew it,” said Mr. Weech, triumphantly; “I can always tell.” He rubbed Dicky’s cap about his head and drew him into the shop, at this hour bare of customers. At the innermost compartment they stopped, and Mr. Weech, with a gentle pressure on the shoulders, seated Dicky at the table.

He brought the coffee, and not a single slice of cake, but two. True, it was not cake of Elevation Mission quality, nor was

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it so good as that shown at the shop in High Street; it was of a browner, dumpier, harder nature, and the currants were gritty and few. But cake it was, and to consider it critically were unworthy. Dicky bolted it with less comfort than he might, for Mr. Weech watched him keenly across the table. And, indeed, from some queer cause, he felt an odd impulse to cry. It was the first time that he had ever been given anything, kindly and ungrudgingly.

He swallowed the last crumb, washed it down with the dregs of his cup, and looked sheepishly across at Mr. Weech.

"Goes down awright, do n't it?" that benefactor remarked. "Ah, I like to see you enjoyin' of yerself. I'm very fond o' you young 'uns, 'specially clever 'uns like you."

Dicky had never been called clever before, so far as he could recollect, and he wondered at it now. Mr. Weech, leaning back, contemplated him smilingly for some

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seconds, and then proceeded. "Yus," he said, "you 're the sort o' boy as can 'ave cawfy an' cake w'enever you want it, you are."

Dicky wondered more, and his face said as much. "You know," Mr. Weech pursued, winking amain, grinning and nodding, "that was a fine watch you found the other day. Y' ought to 'a' brought it to me."

Dicky was alarmed. How did Mr. Weech learn about the watch? Perhaps he was a friend of the funny old man who lost it. Dicky half rose, but his affable patron leaned across and pushed him back on the seat. "You need n't be frightened," he said. "I ain't goin' to say nothink to nobody. But I know all about it, mind, an' I could if I liked. You found the watch, an' it was a red 'un, on a bit o' ribbin. Well, then you went an' took it 'ome, like a little fool. Wot does yer father do? W'y, 'e ups an' lathers you with 'is belt, an' 'e keeps the watch 'isself. That 's all

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you git for yer pains. See—I know all about it.” And Mr. Weech gazed on Dicky Perrott with a fixed grin.

“Oo toldjer?” Dicky managed to ask at last.

“Ah!”—this with a great emphasis and a tapping of the forefinger beside the nose—“I do n’t want much tellin’: it ain’t much as goes on ’ereabout I do n’t know of. Never mind ’ow. P’raps I got a little bird as w’ispers—p’raps I do it some other way. Any’ow I know. It ain’t no good any boy tryin’ to do something unbeknownst to me, mind jer.”

Mr. Weech’s head lay aside, his grin widened, his glance was sidelong, his forefinger pointed from his temple over Dicky’s head, and altogether he looked so very knowing that Dicky shuffled in his seat. By what mysterious means was this new found friend so well informed? The doubt troubled him, for Dicky knew nothing of Mr. Aaron Weech’s con-

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versation an hour before with Tommy Rann.

“But it’s awright, bless yer,” Mr. Weech went on presently. “Nobody’s none the wuss for me knowin’ about ’em. . . . Well, we was a-talkin’ about the watch, was n’t we? All you got, after sich a lot o’ trouble, was a woppin’ with a belt. That was too bad.” Mr. Weech’s voice was piteous and sympathetic. “After you a-findin’ sich a nice watch — a red ’un an’ all — you gits nothink for yerself but a beltin’. Never mind; you’ll do better next time — I’ll take care o’ that. I do n’t like to see a clever boy put upon. You go an’ find another, or somethink else — anythink good — and then you bring it ’ere.”

Mr. Weech’s friendly sympathy extinguished Dicky’s doubt. “I did n’t find it,” he said, shy but proud. “It was a click — I sneaked it.”

“Eh?” ejaculated Mr. Weech, a sud-

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den picture of blank incomprehension. "Eh? What? Click?—wot's a click? Sneaked? Wot's that? I dunno nothink about no talk o' that sort, an I do n't want to. It's my belief it means somethink wrong—but I dunno, an' I do n't want to. 'Ear that? Eh? Do n't let me 'ave no more o' that, or you'd better not come near me agin. If you *find* somethink—awright, you come to me and I'll give ye somethink for it, if it's any good. It ain't no business of anybody's *where* you find it, o' course, an' I do n't want to know. But clicks and sneaks—them's Greek to me, an' I do n't want to learn 'em. Unnerstand that? Nice talk to respectable people, with yer clicks an' sneaks!"

Dicky blushed a little, and felt very guilty without in the least understanding the offense. But Mr. Weech's virtuous indignation subsided as quickly as it had arisen, and he went on as amiably as ever.

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“When you *find* anythink,” he said, “jist like you found that watch, do n’t tell nobody an’ do n’t let nobody see it. Bring it ’ere quiet, when there ain’t any p’lice-man in the street, an’ come right through to the back o’ the shop, an’ say, ‘I come to clean the knives.’ Unnerstand? ‘I come to clean the knives.’ There ain’t no knives to clean — it ’s on’y a way o’ tellin’ me you got somethink without other people knowin.’ An’ then I’ll give you somethink for it — money p’raps, sometimes, or p’raps cake or wot not. Do n’t forget. ‘I come to clean the knives.’ See?”

Yes, Dicky understood perfectly; and Dicky saw a new world of dazzling delights. Cake—limitless cake, coffee, and the like, whenever he might feel moved thereunto; but more than all, money—actual money; good broad pennies, perhaps whole shillings—perhaps even more still; money to buy bullock’s liver for

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dinner, or tripe, or what you fancied; saveloys, baked potatoes from the can on cold nights, a little cart to wheel Looey in, a boat from a toy-shop with sails.

“There’s no end o’ things to be found, all over the place, an’ a sharp boy like you can find ’em every day. If you do n’t find ’em, someone else will; there’s plenty on ’em about, on the look-out, an’ you got jist as much right as them. On’y mind!” — Mr. Weech was suddenly stern and serious, and his forefinger was raised impressively — “You know you can’t do anythink without I know, an’ if you say a word—if you say a word,” his fist came on the table with a bang, “somethink ’ll ’appen to you, somethink bad.”

Mr. Weech rose, and was pleasant again though businesslike. “Now you just go an’ find somethink,” he said. “Look sharp about it, an’ do n’t go an’ git in trouble. The cawfy’s a penny an’ the cake’s a penny — ought prop’ly to be two-

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pence, but say a penny this time — that's twopence you owe me, an' you better bring me somethink an' pay it off quick ; so go along."

This was an unforeseen tag to the entertainment. For the first time in his life Dicky was in debt. It was a little disappointing to find the coffee and cake no gift after all, though, indeed, it now seemed foolish to have supposed they were ; for in Dicky Perrott's world people did not give things away — that were the act of a fool. Thus Dicky, with his hands in his broken pockets, and thought in his small face, whereon still stood the muddy streaks of yesterday's tears, trudged out of Mr. Aaron Weech's shop-door, and along Meakin Street.

Now he was beginning the world seriously, and must face the fact. Truly, the world had been serious enough for him hitherto, but that he knew not. Now he was of an age when most boys were

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thieving for themselves, and he owed money like a man. True it was, as Mr. Weech had said, that everybody—the whole Jago—was on the lookout for himself. Plainly, he must take his share, lest it fall to others. As to the old gentleman's watch, he had but been beforehand. Through foolish ingenuousness he had lost it, and his father had got it, who could so much more easily steal one for himself; for he was a strong man, and had but to knock over another man at any night-time. Nobody should hear of future clicks but Mr. Weech; each for himself. Come, he must open his eyes.

VII

There was no chance all along Meakin Street. The chandlers and the keepers of cookshops knew their neighbourhood too well to leave articles unguarded. Soon Dickey reached Shoreditch High Street. There things were a little more favourable. There were shops, as he well remembered, where goods were sometimes exhibited at the doors and outside the windows; but to-day there seemed to be no chance of the sort. As for the people, he was too short to try pockets, and, indeed, the High Street rarely gave passage to a more unpromising lot. Moreover, from robbery from the person he knew he must abstain, except for such uncommon opportunities as that of the Bishop's watch, for some years yet.

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He hung about the doors and windows of shop after shop, hoping for a temporary absence of the shopkeeper which might leave something snatchable, but he hoped in vain. From most shops he was driven away, for the Shoreditch trader is not slow to judge the purpose of a loitering boy. So he passed nearly two hours; when at last he saw his chance. It came in an advantageous part of High Street, not far from the "Posties," though on the opposite side of the way. A nurse-girl had left a perambulator at a shop door while she bought inside, and on the perambulator lay loose a little skin rug, from which a little fat leg stuck and waved aloft. Dicky set his back to the shop and sidled to within reach of the perambulator. But it chanced that at this moment the nurse-girl stepped to the door, and she made a snatch at his arm as he lifted the rug. This he dropped at once, and was swinging leisurely away (for he despised the chase of any nurse-

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girl) when a man took him suddenly by the shoulder. Quick as a weasel, Dicky ducked under the man's arm, pulled his shoulder clear, dropped forward and rested an instant on the tips of his fingers to avoid the catch of the other hand, and shot out into the road. The man tried to follow, but Dicky ran under the belly of a standing horse, under the head of another that trotted, across the fore-platform of a tram-car—behind the driver's back—and so over to the "Posties."

He slouched into the Jago disappointed. As he crossed Edge Lane, he was surprised to perceive a stranger—a toff, indeed—who walked slowly along, looking up, right and left, at the grimy habitations about him. He wore a tall hat, and his clothes were black, and of a pattern that Dicky remembered to have seen at the Elevation Mission; they were, in fact, the clothes of a clergyman. For himself, he was tall and soundly built, with a certain

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square muscularity of face, and of age about thirty-five. He had ventured into the Jago because the police were in possession, Dicky thought ; and wondered in what plight he would leave had he come at another time. But losing view of the stranger and making his way along Old Jago Street, Dicky perceived that indeed the police were gone, and that the Jago was free.

He climbed the broken stairs and pushed into the first floor back, hopeful, though more doubtful, of dinner. There was none. His mother, tied about the neck with rags, lay across the bed, nursing the damage of yesterday, and commiserating herself. A yard from her lay Looey, sick and ailing in a new way, but disregarded. Dicky moved to lift her but at that she cried the more, and he was fain to let her lie. She rolled her head from side to side and raised her thin little hand vaguely toward it, with feverishly-working fingers.

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Dicky felt her head and she screamed again. There was a lump at the side, a hard sharp lump; got from the stones of the roadway yesterday. And there was a curious quality, a rather fearful quality, in the little wails: uneasily suggestive of the screams of Sally Green's victims.

Father was out, prowling. There was nothing eatable in the cupboard, and there seemed nothing at home worth staying for. He took another look at Looey, but refrained from touching her, and went out.

The opposite door on the landing was wide open, and Dicky could hear nobody in the room. He had never seen this door open before, and now he ventured on a peep; for the tenants of the front room were strangers, late arrivals, and interlopers. Their name was Roper. Roper was a pale cabinet-maker, fallen on evil times and out of work. He had a pale wife, disliked because of her neatly-kept clothes,

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her exceeding use of soap and water, her aloofness from gossip. She had a deadly pale baby; also there was the pale hunch-backed boy of near Dicky's age. Collectively, the Ropers were disliked as strangers, because they furnished their own room, in an obnoxiously complete style; because Roper did not drink, nor brawl, nor beat his wife, nor do anything all day but look for work; because all these things were a matter of scandalous arrogance, impudently subversive of Jago custom and precedent. Mrs. Perrott was bad enough, but such people as these. . . .

Dicky had never before seen quite such a room as this. Everything was so clean; the floor, the windows, the bedclothes. Also there was a strip of old carpet on the floor. There were two perfectly sound chairs, and two pink glass vases on the mantelpiece; and a clock. Nobody was in the room, and Dicky took a

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step farther. The clock attracted him again. It was a small, cheap, nickel-plated cylindrical thing, of American make, and it reminded him at once of the Bishop's watch. It was not gold, certainly, but it was a good deal bigger, and it could go—it was going. Dicky stepped back and glanced at the landing; then he darted into the room, whipped the clock under the breast of the big jacket and went for the stairs.

Half-way down he met the pale hunchback ascending. Left at home alone, he had been standing in the front doorway. He saw Dicky's haste; saw also the suspicious bulge under his jacket, and straightway seized Dicky's arm.

"Where 'a' you bin?" he asked sharply. "Bin in our room? What you got there?"

"Nothin' o' yours, 'ump. Git out o' that!" Dicky pushed him aside. "If ye do n't le' go, I'll corpse ye!"

But one arm and hand was occupied

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with the bulge, and the other was for the moment unequal to the work of driving off the assailant. The two children wrangled and struggled downstairs, through the doorway and into the street; the hunchback, weak but infuriate, buffeting, biting and whimpering; Dicky infuriate too, but alert for a chance to break away and run. So they scrambled together across the street, Dicky dragging away from the house at every step; and just at the corner of Luck Row, getting his fore-arm across the other's face, he back-heeled him, and the little hunchback fell heavily, and lay breathless and sobbing, while Dicky scampered through Luck Row and round the corner into Meakin Street.

Mr. Weech was busier now, for there were customers. But Dicky and his bulge he saw ere they were well over the threshold.

"Ah, yus, Dicky," he said, coming to

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meet him. "I was expectin' you. Come in—

In the swe-e-et by an' by

We shall meet on that beautiful shaw-er!

Come in 'ere."

Still humming his hymn, Mr. Weech led Dicky into the shop parlour. Here Dicky produced the clock, which Mr. Weech surveyed with no great approval.

"You 'll 'ave to try an' do better than this, you know," he said. "But any 'ow 'ere it is, sich as it is. It about clears auf wot you owe, I reckon. Want some dinner?"

This was a fact, and Dicky admitted it.

"Awright—

In the swe-e-e-t by an' by,—

Come out an' set down. I 'll bring you somethink 'ot."

This proved to be a very salt bloater, a cup of the usual muddy coffee, tasting of burnt toast and a bit of bread, afterwards

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supplemented by a slice of cake. This to Dicky was a banquet. Moreover, there was the adult dignity of taking your dinner in a coffee-shop; which Dicky supported indomitably now that he began to feel at ease in Mr. Weech's; leaning back in his seat, swinging his feet, and looking about at the walls with the grocers' almanacks hanging thereto, and the Sunday School Anniversary bills of past date, gathered from afar to signalise the elevated morals of the establishment.

"Done?" queried Mr. Weech in his ear. "Awright, don't 'ang about 'ere then. Bloater's a penny, bread a 'a'peny, cawfy a penny, cake a penny. You'll owe thrippence-'a'peny now."

VIII

When Dicky Perrott and the small hunchback were hauling and struggling across the street, old Fisher came down from the top-floor back, wherein he dwelt with his son Bob, Bob's wife and two sisters, and five children; an apartment in no way so clean as the united efforts of ten people might be expected to have made it. Old Fisher, on whose grimy face the wrinkles were deposits of mud, stopped at the open door on the first floor, and, as Dicky had done, took a peep. Perplexed at the monstrous absence of dirt, and encouraged by the stillness, Old Fisher also ventured within. Nobody was in charge, and Old Fisher, mentally pricing the pink glass vases at three-pence, made for a

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small chest in the corner of the room and lifted the lid. Within lay many of Roper's tools, from among which he had that morning taken such as he might want on an emergent call to work, to carry as he tramped Curtain Road. Clearly these were the most valuable things in the place, and, slipping a few small articles into his pockets, Old Fisher took a good double handful of the larger, and tramped upstairs with them. Presently he returned with Bob's missus, and together they started with more. As they emerged, however, there on the landing stood the little hunchback, sobbing and smearing his face with his sleeve. At sight of this new pillage he burst into sharp wails, standing impotent on the landing, his streaming eyes following the man and woman ascending before him. Old Fisher, behind, stumped the stairs with a clumsy affectation of absent-mindedness; the woman in front looked

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down, merely indifferent. Scarce were they vanished above, however, when the little hunchback heard his father and mother on the lower stairs.

IX

Dicky came moodily back from his dinner at Mr. Weech's, plunged in mystified computation: starting with a debt of twopence, he had paid Mr. Weech an excellent clock—a luxurious article in Dicky's eyes—had eaten a bloater, and had emerged from the transaction owing threepence half-penny. Of what such a clock cost he had no notion, though he felt it must be some inconceivable sum. As Mr. Weech put it the adjustment of accounts would seem to be quite correct; but the broad fact that all had ended in increasing his debt by three half-pence, remained and perplexed him. He remembered having seen such clocks in a shop in Norton Folgate. To ask the

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price, in person, were but to be chased out of the shop ; but they were probably ticketed, and perhaps he might ask some bystander to read the ticket. This brought the reflection that, after all, reading was a useful accomplishment on occasion ; though a matter of too much time and trouble to be worth while. Dicky had never been to school ; for the Elementary Education Act ran in the Jago no more than any other Act of Parliament. There was a Board School, truly, away out of the Jago bounds, by the corner of Honey Lane, where children might go free, and where some few Jago children did go now and again, when boots were to be given away, or when tickets were to be had, for tea, or soup, or the like. But most parents were of Josh Perrott's opinion — that school-going was a practice best never begun ; for then the child was never heard of, and there was no chance of inquiries or such trouble — not that any such inquiries

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were common in the Jago, or led to anything.

Meantime Dicky, minded to know if his adventure had made any stir in the house, carried his way deviously towards home. Working through the parts beyond Jago Row, he fetched 'round into Honey Lane, so coming at New Jago Street from the farther side. Choosing one of the houses whose backs gave on Jago Court, he slipped through the passage, and so, by the back-yard, crawled through the broken fence into the court. Left and right were the fronts of houses, four a side. Before him, to the right of the narrow archway leading to Old Jago Street, was the window of his own home. He gained the back-yard quietly, and at the kitchen door met Tommy Rann.

"Come on," called Tommy. "'Ere's a barney! They're a-pitchin' into them noo 'uns—Roperses. Roperses sez Fish-

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erses is sneaked their things. They are a-gittin' of it !”

From the stairs, indeed, came shouts and curses, bumps and sobs and cries. The first landing and half the stairs were full of people, men and women, Ranns and Learys together. When Ranns joined Learys it was an ill omen for them they marched against ; and never were they so ready and anxious to combine as after a fight between themselves, were but some common object of attack available. Here it was. Here were these pestilent outsiders, the Ropers, assailing the reputation of the neighbourhood by complaining of being robbed. As though their mere presence in the Jago, with their furniture and their superiority, were not obnoxious enough: they must turn about and call their neighbours thieves. They had been tolerated too long already. They should now be given something for themselves, and have some of their exasperating respectability knocked off: and if,

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in the confusion, their portable articles of furniture and bed-clothing found their way into more deserving hands—why, serve them right.

The requisite volleys of preliminary abuse having been discharged, more active operations began under cover of fresh volleys. Dicky, with Tommy Rann behind him, struggled up the stairs among legs and skirts, and saw that the Ropers, the man flushed, but the woman paler than ever, were striving to shut their door. Within, the hunchback and the baby cried, and without, those on the landing, skidding the door with their feet, pushed inward, and now began to strike and maul. Somebody seized the man's wrist, and Nora Walsh got the woman by the hair and dragged her head down. In a peep through the scuffle Dicky saw her face, ashen and sweat-beaded, in the jamb of the door, and saw Nora Walsh's red fist beat into it twice. Then somebody came striding up the stairs,

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and Dicky was pushed further back. Over the shoulders of those about him, Dicky saw a tall hat, and then the head beneath it. It was the stranger he had seen in Edge Lane—the parson; active and resolute.

Nora Walsh he took by the shoulders and flung back among the others, and, as he turned on him, the man who held Roper's wrist released it and backed off.

“What is this?” demanded the newcomer, stern and hard of face. “What is all this?” He bent his frown on one and another about him, and as he did it, some shrank uneasily, and on the faces of others fell the blank lack of expression that was wont to meet police enquiry in the Jago. Dicky looked to see this man beaten down, kicked and stripped. But a well-dressed stranger was so new a thing in the Jago, this one had dropped among them so suddenly, and had withal so bold a confidence, that the Jagos stood irresolute. A toff was not a person to be attacked without due

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consideration. After such a person there were apt to be inquiries, with money to back them, and vengeance sharp and certain: the thing, indeed, was commonly thought too risky. And this man, so unflinchingly confident, must needs have reason for it. He might have the police at instant call—they might be back in the Jago at the moment. And he flung them back, commanded them, cowed them with his hard, intelligent eyes, like a tamer among beasts.

“Understand this, now,” he went on, with a sharp tap of his stick on the floor. “This is a sort of thing I will *not* tolerate in my parish—in this parish; nor in any other place where I may meet it. Go away, and try to be ashamed of yourselves—go. Go, all of you, I say, to your own homes; I shall come there and talk to you again soon. Go along, Sam Cash—you’ve a broken head already, I see. Take it away; I shall come and see you too.”

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Those on the stairs had melted away like punished school-children. Most of the others, after a moment of averted face and muttered justification one to another, were dragging their feet, each with a hang-dog pretence of sauntering airily off from some sight no longer interesting. Sam Cash, who had already seen the stranger in the street, and was thus perhaps a trifle less startled than the others at his advent, stood, however, with some assumption of virtuous impudence, till amazed by sudden address in his own name; whereat, clean discomfited, he ignominiously turned tail and sneaked downstairs in meaner case than the rest. How should this strange parson know him, and know his name? Plainly he must be connected with the police. He had brought out the name as pat as you please. So argued Sam Cash with his fellows in the outer street: never recalling that Jerry Gullen had called aloud to him by name, when first he observed

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the parson in the street ; had called to him, indeed, to haste to the bashing of the Ropers ; and thus had first given the stranger notice of the proceeding. But it was the way of the Jago that its mean cunning saw a mystery and a terror where simple intelligence saw there was none.

As the crowd began to break up, Dicky pushed his own door a little open behind him and there stood on his own ground as the others cleared off ; and the hunchback ventured a peep from behind his swooning mother.

“ There y’ are, that ’s ’im ! ” he shouted, pointing at Dicky. “ ’E begun it ! ’E took the clock ! ”

Dicky instantly dropped behind his door and shut it fast.

The invaders had all gone—the Fishers had made upstairs in the beginning—before the parson turned and entered the Ropers’ room. In five minutes he emerged and strode upstairs ; whence he returned

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after a still shorter interval, herding before him Old Fisher and Bob Fisher's missis, sulky and reluctant, carrying tools.

And thus it was that the Reverend Henry Sturt first addressed his parishioners. The parish, besides the Jago, comprised Meakin Street and some way beyond; and it was to this less savage district that his predecessor had confined his attention. Preaching every Sunday in a stable, behind a disused shop, in an alley, and distributing loaves and sixpences to the old women who attended regalarly on that account. For to go into the Jago were for him mere wasted effort. And so, indeed, the matter had been since the parish came into being.

X

When Dicky retreated from the landing and shut the door behind him, he slipped the bolt, a strong one, put there by Josh Perrott himself, possibly as an accessory to escape by the window in some possible desperate pass. For a little he listened, but no sound hinted of attack from without, and he turned to his mother.

Josh Perrott had been out since early morning, and Dicky, too, had done no more than look in for a moment in search of dinner. Hannah Perrott, grown tired of self-commiseration, felt herself neglected and aggrieved—slighted in her state of invalid privilege. So she transferred some of her pity from her sore neck to her desolate condition as misprized wife and mother, and, the better to feel it, proceeded to martyrise

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herself, with melancholy pleasure, by a nerveless show of "setting to rights" in the room—a domestic novelty, perfunctory as it was. Looey, still restless and weeping, she left on the bed, for, being neglected herself, it was not her mood to tend the baby; she would aggravate the relish of her sorrows in her own way. Besides, Looey had been given something to eat a long time ago, and had not eaten it yet; with her there was nothing else to do. So that now, as she dragged a rag along the grease-strewn mantelpiece, Mrs. Perrott greeted Dicky: "There y' are, Dicky, comin' 'inderin' 'ere jest when I'm a-puttin' things to rights." And she sighed with the weight of another grievance.

Looey lay on her back, faintly and vainly struggling to turn her fearful little face from the light. Clutched in her little fist was the unclean stump of bread she had held for hours. Dicky plucked a soft piece and essayed to feed her with it, but

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the dry little mouth rejected the morsel and the head turned feverishly from side to side to the sound of that novel cry. She was hot wherever Dicky touched her, and presently he said:—"Mother, I b'lieve Looey's queer. I think she wants some med'cine."

His mother shook her head peevishly. "O you an' Looey's a noosance," she said. "A lot you care about *me* bein' queer, you an' yer father too, leavin' me all alone like this an' me feelin' ready to drop, an' got the room to do an' all. I wish you'd go away an' stop 'inderin' of me like this."

Dicky took but another look at Looey and then slouched out. The landing was clear, and the Ropers' door was shut. He wondered what had become of the stranger with the tall hat—whether he was in the Ropers' room or not. The thought hurried him, for he feared to have that stranger asking him questions about the clock. He

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got out into the street, thoughtful. He had some compunctions in the matter of that clock, now. Not that he could in any reasonable way blame himself. There the clock had stood at his mercy, and by all Jago custom and ethic it was his if only he could get clear away with it. This he had done, and he had no more concern in the business, strictly speaking. Nevertheless, since he had seen the woman's face in the jamb of the door he felt a sort of pity for her that she should have lost her clock. No doubt she had enjoyed its possession, as, indeed, he would have enjoyed it himself, had he not had to take it instantly to Mr. Weech. And his fancy wandered off in meditation of what he would do with a clock of his own. To begin with, of course, he would open it, and discover the secret of its works and its ticking: perhaps thereby discovering how to make a clock himself. Also he would frequently

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wind it up, and he would show the inside to Looey, in confidence. It would stand on the mantelpiece, and raise the social position of the family. People would come respectfully to ask the time, and he would tell them, with an air. Yes, certainly a clock must stand eminent among the things he would buy, when he had plenty of money. He must look out for more clicks: the one way to riches.

As to the Ropers, again. Bad it must be, indeed, to be deprived suddenly of a clock, after long experience of the joys it brought; and Nora Walsh had punched the woman in the face, and clawed her hair, and the woman could not fight. Dicky was sorry for her, and straightway resolved to give her another clock—or, if not a clock, something that would please her as much. He had acquired a clock in the morning; why not another in the afternoon? Failing a clock, he would try for something else, and the Ropers should

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have it. The resolve gave Dicky a virtuous exultation of spirit, the reward of the philanthropist.

Again he began the prowl after likely plunder that was to be his daily industry. Meakin Street he did not try. The chandlers' and the cook shops held nothing that might be counted a consolatory equivalent for a clock. Through the "Posties" he reached Shoreditch High Street at once, and started.

This time his movements aroused less suspicion. In the morning he had no particular prize in view, and loitered at every shop, waiting his chance at anything portable. Now, with a more definite object, he made his promenade easily, but without stopping or lounging by shop-fronts. The thing, whatsoever it might be, must be small, handsome, and of an interesting character—at least as interesting as the clock was. It must be small, not merely for facility of concealment and removal—

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though these were main considerations—but because stealthy presentation were then the easier. It would have pleased Dicky to hand over his gift openly, and to bask in the thanks and consideration it would procure. But he had been accused of stealing the clock, and an open gift would savour of admission and peace-offering, whereas in that matter stark denial was his plain course.

A roll of printed stuff would not do; apples would not do; and fish was wide of his purpose. Up one side and down the other side of High Street he walked, his eye instant for suggestion and opportunity. But all in vain. Nobody exposed clocks out of doors, and of those within not one but an attempt on it were simple madness. And of the things less desperate of access, nothing was proper to the occasion; all were too large, too cheap, or too uninteresting. Oddly, Dicky feared failure more than had he been hunting for himself.

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He tried further south, in Norton Folgate. There was a shop of cheap second-hand miscellanies; saddles, razors, straps, dumb-bells, pistols, boxing gloves, trunks, bags, and billiard-balls. Many of the things hung about the door-posts in bunches, and within all was black, as in a cave. At one door-post was a pistol. Nothing could be more interesting than a pistol — indeed, it was altogether a better possession than a clock; and it was a small, handy sort of thing. Probably the Ropers would be delighted with a pistol. He stood and regarded it with much interest. There were difficulties. In the first place, it was beyond his reach; and, in the second, it hung by the trigger-guard on a stout cord. Just then, glancing within the shop, he perceived a pair of fiery eyes regarding him, panther-like, from the inner gloom; and he hastily resumed his walk, as the Jew shop-keeper reached the door and watched him safely away.

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Now he came to Bishopsgate Street, and here at last he chose the gift. It was at a toy-shop; a fine, flaming toy-shop, with carts, dolls and hoops dangling above, and wooden horses standing below, guarding two baskets by the door. One contained a mixed assortment of tops, whips, boats, and woolly dogs; the other was lavishly filled with shining, round metal boxes nobly decorated with coloured pictures, each box with a little cranked handle. As he looked, a tune, delightfully tinkled on some instrument, was heard from within the shop. Dicky peeped. There was a lady, with a little girl at her side, looking eagerly at just such a shining round box in the saleswoman's hands, and it was from that box, as the saleswoman turned the handle, that the tune came. Dicky was enchanted. This—this was the thing, beyond debate; a pretty little box that would play music whenever you turned a handle. This was a thing worth any fifty

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clocks. Indeed, it was almost as good as a regular barrel organ, the first thing he would buy if he were rich.

There was a shop-boy in charge of the goods outside the window, and his eyes were on Dicky. So Dicky whistled absently, and strolled carelessly along. He swung behind a large waggon, crossed the road, and sought a convenient door-step; for his mind was made up, and his business was now to sit down before the toy-shop and wait his opportunity.

A shop had been boarded up after a fire, and from its doorstep one could command a perfect view of the toy-shop across the broad thoroughfare with its crowded traffic — could sit, moreover, safe from interference. Here Dicky took his seat, secure from the notice of the guardian shop-boy, whose attention was given to passengers on his own side. The little girl, gripping the new toy in her hand, came out at her mother's side and trotted off. For a mo-

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ment Dicky reflected that the box could be easily snatched, but after all the little girl had but one; whereas the shop-woman had many, and at best could play on no more than one at a time.

He resumed his watch of the shop-boy, confident that, sooner or later, a chance would come. A woman stopped to ask the price of something, and Dicky had half crossed the road ere the boy had begun to answer. But the answer was short, the boy's attention was released too soon.

At last the shop-woman called the boy within, and Dicky darted across — not directly, but so as to arrive invisibly at the side next the basket of music-boxes. A quick glance behind him, a snatch at the box with the reddest picture, and a dash into the traffic did it.

The dash away would not have been necessary but for the sudden reappearance of the shop-boy ere the box had vanished

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amid the intricacies of Dicky's jacket. Dicky was fast, but the boy was little slower, and was, moreover, bigger, and stronger on his legs. Dicky reached the other pavement and turned the next corner into Widegate Street, the pursuer scarce ten yards behind. It was now that Dicky first experienced "hot beef"—which is the Jago idiom denoting the plight of one harried by the cry "Stop thief!" Down Widegate Street, across Sandys Row and into Raven Row he ran his best, clutching the hem of his jacket and the music-box that lay within. Crossing Sandys Row a loafing lad shouldered against the shop-boy, and Dicky was grateful, for he made it a gain of several yards.

But others had joined in the hunt, and Dicky for the first time began to fear. This was a bad day—twice already he had been chased; and now—it was bad. He thought little more, for a stunning

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fear fell upon him: the fear of the hunted, that calculates nothing and is measured by no apprehension of consequences. He remembered that he must avoid Spitalfields Market, full of men who would stop him; and he knew that in many places where a man would be befriended, many would make a virtue of stopping a boy. To the right along Bell Lane he made an agonised burst of speed, and for a while he saw not nor remembered anything; heard no more than dreadful shouts drawing nearer his shoulders, felt only the fear. But he could not last. Quick enough when fresh, he was tiny and ill-fed, and he now felt his legs trembling and his wind going. Something seemed to beat on the back of his head, till he wondered madly if it were the shop-boy with a stick. He turned corners and chose his way by mere instinct, ashen-faced, staring, open-mouthed. How soon would he give in, and drop? A street more — half a street — ten yards? Roll-

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ing and tripping, he turned one last corner and almost fell against a vast, fat, unkempt woman whose clothes slid from her shoulders.

“’Ere y’ are boy,” said the woman, and flung him by the shoulder through the doorway before which she stood.

He was saved at his extremity, for he could never have reached the street’s end. The woman who had done it (probably she had boys of her own on the crook) filled the entrance with her frowsy bulk, and the chase straggled past. Dicky caught the stair-post for a moment’s support, and then staggered out at the back of the house. He gasped, he panted, things danced blue before him, but still he clutched his jacket hem and the music-box lying within. The back door gave on a cobble-paved court, with other doors, two coster’s barrows and a few dusty fowls. Dicky sat on a step where a door was shut and rested his head against the frame.

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The beating in his head grew slower and lighter, and presently he could breathe with no fear of choking. He rose and moved off, still panting, and feeble in the legs. The court ended in an arched passage through which he gained the street beyond. Here he had but to turn to the left, and he was in Brick Lane, and thence all was clear to the Old Jago. Regaining his breath and his confidence as he went, he bethought him of the Jago Row retreat, where he might examine his prize at leisure, embowered amid trucks and barrows. Thither he pushed his way, and soon, in the shade of the upturned barrow, he brought out the music-box. Bright and shiny, it had taken no damage in the flight, though on his hands he found scratches, and on his shins bruises, got he knew not how. On the top of the box was the picture of a rosy little boy in crimson presenting a scarlet nosegay to a rosy little girl in pink, while a red brick

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mansion filled the distance and solidified the composition. The brilliant hoop that made the sides (silver, Dicky was convinced) was stamped in patterns, and the little brass handle was an irresistible temptation. Dicky climbed a truck and looked about him, peeping from beside the loose fence-plank. Then, seeing nobody very near, he muffled the box as well as he could in his jacket and turned the handle.

This was, indeed, worth all the trouble. "Linger longer, Loo," was the tune, and Dicky, with his head aside and his ear on the bunch of jacket that covered the box, listened; his lips parted, his eyes seeking illimitable space. He played the tune through, and played it again; and then, growing reckless, played it with the box unmuffled, till he was startled by a bang on the fence from without. It was but a passing boy with a stick, but Dicky was sufficiently disturbed to abandon his quarters and take his music elsewhere.

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What he longed to do was to take it home and play it to Looey, but that was out of the question; he remembered the watch. But there was Jerry Gullen's canary, and him Dicky sought and found. Canary blinked solemnly when the resplendent box was flashed in his eyes, and set his ears back and forward as, muffled again in Dicky's jacket, it tinkled out its tune.

Tommy Rann should not see it, lest he prevail over its munificent dedication to the Ropers. Truly, as it was, Dicky's resolution was hard to abide by. The thing acquired at such a cost of patience, address, hard flight and deadly fear was surely his by right—as surely, quite, as the clock had been. And such a thing he might never touch again.

But he put by the temptation manfully, and came out by Jerry Gullen's front door. He would look no more on the music-box, beautiful as it was: he would convey it to the Ropers before temptation came again.

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It was not easy to devise likely means. Their door was shut fast, of course. For a little while he favoured the plan of setting the box against the threshold, knocking and running off. But an opportunity might arise of doing the thing in a way to give him some glimpse of the Ropers' delight, an indulgence he felt entitled to. So he waited a little, listened a little, and at last came out into the street and loafed.

It was near six o'clock, and a smell of bloater hung about Jerry Gullen's door and window; under the raised sash Jerry Gullen, close cropped and foxy of face, smoked his pipe, sprawled his elbows, and contemplated the world. Dicky, with the music box stowed out of sight, looked as blank of design and as destitute of possession as he could manage; for there were loafers near Mother Gapp's, loafers at the Luck Row corner — at every corner — and loafers by the "Posties," all laggard of limb and alert of eye. He had just

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seen a child, going with an empty beer-can, thrown down, robbed of his coppers and a poor old top, and kicked away in helpless tears; and the incident was commonplace enough, or many would have lacked pocket-money. Whosoever was too young, too old, or too weak to fight for it, must keep what he had well hidden, in the Jago.

Down the street came Billy Leary, big, flushed and limping, and hanging to a smaller man by a fistful of his coat on the shoulder. Dicky knew the small man for a good toy-getter (which=watch-stealer),—and judged he had had a good click, the proceeds whereof Billy Leary was battenning upon in beer-shops. For Billy Leary rarely condescended to anything less honourable than bashing, and had not yet fallen so low as to go about stealing for himself. His missus brought many to the cosh, and his chief necessity—another drink—he merely demanded of the nearest person with the money to buy it, on pain of bash-

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ing. Or he walked into the nearest public house, selected the fullest pot, and spat in it: a ceremony that deprived the purchaser of further interest in the beer and left it at his own disposal. There were others, both Ranns and Learys, who pursued a similar way of life; but Billy Leary was biggest among them—big men not being common in the Jago—and rarely came to difficulty: as however he did once, having invaded the pot of a stranger, who turned out to be a Mile End pugilist exploring Shoreditch. It was not well for any Jago who had made a click to have Billy Leary know of it; for then the clicker was apt to be sought out, clung to, and sucked dry; possibly bashed as well, when nothing more was left, if Billy Leary were still but sober enough for the work.

Dicky gazed after the man with interest. It was he whom his father was to fight in a week or so—perhaps in a few days: on the first Sunday, indeed, that Leary should

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be deemed fit enough. How much of the limp was due to yesterday's disaster and how much to to-day's beer Dicky could not judge. But there seemed little reason to look for a long delay before the fight. As Dicky turned away a man pushed a large truck round the corner from Edge Lane, and on the footpath beside it walked the parson, calm as ever, with black clothes and tall hat, whole and unsoiled. He had made himself known in the Jago in course of that afternoon. He had traversed it from end to end, street by street, and alley by alley. His self-possession, his readiness, his unbending firmness, abashed and perplexed the Jagos, and his appearance just as the police had left could but convince them that he must have some mysterious and potent connexion with the force. He had attempted very little in the way of domiciliary visiting, being content for the time to see his parish and speak

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here a word and there another with his parishioners. An encounter with Kiddo Cook did as much as anything toward securing him a proper deference. In his second walk through Old Jago Street, as he neared The Feathers, he was aware of a bunch of grinning faces pressed against the bar window; and as he came abreast, forth stepped Kiddo Cook from the door, impudently affable, smirking and ducking with mock obsequiousness, and offering a quart pot.

“An’ ’ow jer find jerself, sir?” he asked, with pantomime cordiality. “Hof’ly shock-in’, these ’ere lower classes, ain’t they? Er—yus; disgustin’, weally. Er—might I—er—prepose—er—a little refreshment? Allow me!”

The parson, grimly impassive, heard him through, took the pot, and, instantly jerking it upward, shot the beer, a single splash, into Kiddo’s face. “There are things I

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must teach you, I see, my man," he said, without moving a muscle, except to return the pot.

Kiddo Cook, coughing, drenched and confounded, took the pot instinctively and backed to Mother Gapp's door, while the bunch of faces at the bar window tossed and rolled in a joyous ecstasy; the ghost whereof presently struggled painfully among Kiddo's own dripping features as he realised the completeness of his defeat, and the expedience of a patient grin. The parson went calmly on.

Before this, indeed when he left the Ropers' room, and just after Dicky had started out, he had looked in at the Perrotts' quarters to speak about the clock. But plainly no clock was there, and Mrs. Perrott's flaccid indignation at the suggestion, and her unmistakable ignorance of the affair, decided him to carry the matter no further, at any rate for the present. Moreover, the little hunchback's tale was incon-

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clusive. He had seen no clock in Dicky's possession — had but met him on the stairs with a bulging jacket. The thing might be suspicious, but the new parson knew better than to peril his influence by charging where he could not convict. So he duly commiserated Hannah Perrott's troubles, suggested that the baby seemed unwell and had better be taken to a doctor, and went his way about the Jago.

Now he stopped at the truck by Dicky's front door and mounted to the Ropers' room. For he had seen that the Jago was no place for them now, and had himself found them a suitable room away by Dove Lane. And so, emboldened by his company, the Ropers came forth, and with the help of the man who had brought the truck, carried down the pieces of their bedstead, a bundle of bedding, the two chairs, the pink vases and the strip of old carpet, and piled them on the truck with the few more things that were theirs.

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Dicky, with his hand on the music box in the lining of his jacket, sauntered up by the tail of the truck and, waiting his chance, plunged his gift under the bundle of bedding and left it there. But the little hunchback's sharp eyes were jealously on him, and, "Look there!" he squealed. "'E put 'is 'and in the truck and took some-think!"

"Ye lie!" answered Dicky, indignant and hurt, but cautiously backing off; "I ain't got nothink." He spread his hands and opened his jacket in proof. "Think I got yer bloomin' bedstead?"

He had nothing, it was plain. In fact, at the tail of the truck there was nothing he could easily have moved at all, certainly nothing he could have concealed. So the rest of the little removal was hurried, for heads were now at windows, the loafers began to draw about the truck, and trouble might break out at any moment: indeed, the Ropers could never have ven-

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tured from their room but for the general uneasy awe of the parson. For nothing was so dangerous in the Jago as to impugn its honesty. To rob another was reasonable and legitimate, and to avoid being robbed, so far as might be, was natural and proper. But to accuse anybody of a theft was unsportsmanlike, a foul outrage, a shameful abuse, a thing unpardonable. You might rob a man, bash a man, even kill a man; but to "take away his character"—even when he had none—was to draw the execrations of the whole Jago; while to assail the pure fame of the place—to "give the street a bad name"—this was to bring the Jago howling and bashing about your ears.

The truck moved off at last, amid murmurings, mutterings and grunts from the onlookers. The man of the truck pulled, Roper shoved behind, and his wife, with her threadbare decency and her meagre, bruised face, carried the baby, while the

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hunchbacked boy went by her side. All this under convoy of the Reverend Henry Sturt.

A little distance gave more confidence to a few, and when the group had reached within a score of yards of Edge Lane, there came a hoot or two, a "Yah!" and other less spellable sounds, expressive of contempt and defiance. Roper glanced back nervously, but the rest held on their way regardless. Then came a brickbat, which missed the woman by very little and struck the truck-wheel. At this the parson stopped and turned on his heel, and Cocko Harnwell, the flinger, drove his hands into his breeches-pockets and affected an interest in Mother Gapp's window, till, perceiving the parson's eyes directed sternly upon him, and the parson's stick rising to point at him, he ingloriously turned tail, and scuttled into Jago Court.

And so the Ropers left the Jago. Dove Lane was but a stone-throw ahead when

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some of the load shifted, and the truck was stopped to set the matter right. The chest was pushed back and the bedding was lifted to put against it, and so the musical-box came to light. Roper picked it up and held it before the Vicar's eyes. "Look at that, sir," he said. "You'll witness I know nothing of it, won't you? It ain't mine an' I never saw it before. It's bin put in for spite, to put a theft on us. When they come for it you'll bear me out sir, won't you? That was the Perrott boy as was put up to do that, I'll be bound. When he was behind the truck."

But nobody came for Dicky's gift, and in the Jago twilight Dicky vainly struggled to whistle the half-remembered tune: and to persuade himself that he was not sorry that the box was gone.

XI.

Josh Perrott reached home late for tea but in good humor. He had spent most of the day at the Bag of Nails, dancing attendance on the High Mobsmen. Those of the High Mob were the flourishing practitioners in burglary, the mag, the mace, and the broads, with an outer fringe of such dippers — pickpockets — as could dress well, welshers and snidesmen. These, the grandees of rascality, lived in places far from the Jago, and some drove in gigs and pony traps. But they found the Bag of Nails a convenient and secluded exchange and house of call, and there they met, made appointments, designed villainies, and tossed for sovereigns: deeply revered by the admiring Jagos, among whom no ambition flourished but this—to become

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also of these resplendent ones. It was of these that old Beveridge had spoken one day to Dicky, in language the child but half understood. The old man sat on a kerb in view of the Bag of Nails and smoked a blackened bit of clay pipe. He hauled Dicky to his side, and, pointing with his pipe, said:—"See that man with the furs?"

"What?" Dicky replied. "Mean 'im in the ice-cream coat, smokin' a cigar? Yus."

"And the other, with the brimmy tall-hat, and the red face, and the umbrella?"

"Yus."

"What are they?"

"'Igh mob. 'Ooks. Toffs."

"Right. Now, Dicky Perrott, you Jago whelp, look at them—look hard. Some day, if you're clever—cleverer than anyone in the Jago now—if you're only scoundrel enough, and brazen enough, and lucky enough—one of a thousand—

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maybe you 'll be like them : bursting with high living, drunk when you like, red and pimply. There it is — that's your aim in life — there's your pattern. Learn to read and write, learn all you can, learn cunning, spare nobody and stop at nothing, and perhaps —" he waved his hand toward the Bag of Nails. "It's the best the world has for you, for the Jago's got you, and that's the only way out, except gaol and the gallows. So do your devil-moat, or God help you, Dicky Perrott — though He won't: for the Jago's got you !"

Old Beveridge had eccentric talk and manners, and the Jago regarded him as a trifle "balmy," though anything but a fool. So that Dicky troubled little to sift the meaning of what he said.

Josh Perrott's mission among the High Mob had been to discover some Mob-man who might be disposed to back him in the fight with Billy Leary. For though

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a private feud were the first cause of the turn-up, still, business must never be neglected, and a feud or anything else that could produce money must be made to produce it, and when a fight of exceptional merit is placed before spectators, it is but fair that they should pay for their diversion.

But few High Mobsmen were at the Bag of Nails that day. Sunday was the day of the chief gatherings of the High Mob: Sunday the market-day, so to speak, of the Jago, when such such rent as was due weekly was paid (most of the Jago rents were paid daily and nightly) and other accounts were settled or fought out. Moreover, the High Mob were perhaps a trifle shy of the Jago at the time of a faction fight; and one was but just over, and that cut short at a third of the usual span of days. So that Josh waited long and touted vainly till a patron arrived who knew him of old; who had employed him, indeed, as "mind-

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er"—which means a protector or a bully, as you please to regard it—on a race-course adventure involving bodily risk. On this occasion Josh had earned his wages with hard knocks, given and taken, and his employer had conceived a high and a thankful opinion of his capacity. Wherefore he listened now to the tale of the coming fight, and agreed to provide something in the way of stakes, and to put something "on" for Josh himself: looking for his own profit to the bets he might make at favourable odds with his friends. For Billy Leary was notorious as being near prime ruffian of the Jago, while Josh's reputation was neither so evil nor so wide. And so it was settled, and Josh came pleased to his tea; for assuredly Billy Leary would have no difficulty in finding another notable of the High Mob to cover the stakes.

Dicky was at home, sitting by Looey on the bed, and when he called his father

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it seemed pretty plain to Josh that the baby was out of sorts. "She's rum about the eyes," he said to his wife. "Blimy if she do n't look as though she was goin' to squint."

Josh was never particularly solicitous as to the children, but he saw that they were fed and clothed — perhaps by mere force of the habit of his more reputable days of plastering. He had brought home tripe, rolled in paper, and stuffed into his coat pocket, to make a supper on the strength of the day's stroke of business. When this tripe was boiled, he and Dicky essayed to drive morsels into Looey's mouth, and to wash them down with beer; but to no end but choking rejection. Whereat Josh decided that she must go to the dispensary in the morning. And in the morning he took her, with Dicky at his heels; for not only did his wife still nurse her neck, but in truth she feared to venture abroad.

The dispensary was no charitable insti-

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tution, but a shop so labeled in Meakin Street, one of half a dozen such kept by a medical man who lived away from them, and bothered himself as little about them as was consistent with banking the takings and signing the death certificates. A needy young student, whose sole qualification was cheapness, was set to do the business of each place, and the uniform price for advice and medicine was sixpence. But there was a deal of professional character in the blackened and gilt-lettered front windows, and the sixpences came by hundreds. For hospital letters but rarely came Meakin Street way. Such as did were mostly in the hands of tradesmen who subscribed for the purpose of getting them, and gave them to their best customers, as was proper and business-like. And so the dispensary flourished, and the needy young student grew shifty and callous, and no doubt there were occasional faith-cures. Indeed, cures of simple science were not at

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all impossible. For there was always a good supply of two drugs in the place—Turkey rhubarb and sulphuric acid; both very useful, both very cheap, and both going very far in varied preparation, properly handled. An ounce or two of sulphuric acid, for instance, costing something fractional, dilutes with water into many gallons of physic. Excellent medicines they made, too, and balanced each other remarkably well by reason of their opposite effects. But indeed they were not all, for sometimes there were other two or three drugs in hand, interfering, perhaps troublesomely, with the simple division of therapeutics into the two provinces of rhubarb and sulphuric acid.

Business was brisk at the dispensary: several were waiting, and medicine and advice were going at the rate of two minutes for sixpence. Looey's case was not so clear as most of the others; she could not describe its symptoms succinctly, as

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“a pain here,” or “a tight feeling there.” She did but lie heavily, staring blankly upward (she did not mind the light now) with the little cast in her eyes, and repeat her odd little wail; and Dicky and her father could tell very little. The young student had a passing thought that he might have known a trifle more of the matter if he had had time to turn up Ross on nerve and brain troubles—were such a proceeding consistent with the dignity of the dispensary—but straightway assigning the case to the rhubarb province, made up a powder, ordered Josh to keep the baby quiet, and pitched his sixpence among the others well within the two minutes.

And faith in the dispensary was strengthened, for indeed Looey seemed a little better after the powder; and she was fed with spoonfuls of a fluid bought at a chandler's shop, and called milk.

XII

"Dicky Perrott, come 'ere," said Mr. Aaron Weech in a voice of sad rebuke, a few days later. "Come 'ere, Dicky Perrott."

He shook his head solemnly as he stooped. Dicky slouched up.

"What was that you found the other day and did n't bring to me?"

"Nuffin'." Dicky withdrew a step.

"It's no good you a-tellin' me that, Dicky Perrott, when I know better. You know very well you can't prevent me knowin'." His little eyes searched Dicky's face, and Dicky sulkily shifted his own gaze. "You 're a wicked, ungrateful young 'ound, an' I've a good mind to tell a p'liceman to find out where you got that clock. Come 'ere, now — do n't you try

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runnin' away. Wot! After me a-takin' you in when you was 'ungry, an' givin' you cawfy an' cake, an' good advice like a father, an' a bloater an' all, and you owin' me thrippence 'a'peny besides, then you goes an'—an takes your findin's somewhere else!"

"I never!" protested Dicky stoutly. but Mr. Weech's cunning, equal to a shrewd guess that since his last visit Dicky had probably had another "find," and quick to detect a lie, was slack to perceive a truth.

"Now, don't you go an' add on a wicked lie to your sinful ungratefulness, wotever you do," he said severely, "that's wuss, and I alwis know. Doncher know the little 'ymn?:—

'An' 'im as does one fault at fust
An' lies to 'ide it, makes it two!"

It's bad enough to be ungrateful to me as is bin so kind to you, an' it's wuss to break the fust commandment. If the

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bloater do n't infloocene you, the 'oly 'ymn ought. 'Ow would you like me to go an' ask yer father for that thrippence 'a'peny you owe me? That's wot I'll 'ave to do, if you do n't mind."

Dicky would not have liked it at all, as his frightened face testified.

"Then find somethink an' pay it at once, an' then I wo n't. I wo n't be 'ard on you, if you 'll be a good boy. But do n't git playin' no more tricks—cos I 'll know all about 'em. Now, go and find somethink quick." And Dicky went.

XIII

Ten days after his first tour of the Old Jago, the Reverend Henry Sturt first preached in the parish church made of a stable, in an alley behind Meakin Street, but few yards away, though beyond sight and sound of the Jago.

There, that Sunday morning was a morning of importance, a time of excitement, for the fight between Billy Leary and Josh Perrott was to come off in Jago Court. The assurance that there was money in the thing was a sovereign liniment for Billy Leary's bruises—for they were but bruises—and he hastened to come by that money, lest it melt by caprice of the backers, or the backers themselves fall at unlucky odds with the police. He made little of Josh Perrott, his hardness and known

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fighting power notwithstanding. For was there not full a stone and a half between their weights? and had Billy not four or five inches the better in height and a commensurate advantage in reach? And Billy Leary's own hardness and fighting power were well proved enough.

It was past eleven o'clock. The weekly rents—for the week forthcoming—had been extracted, or partly extracted, or scuffled over. Old Poll Rann, who had made money in sixty-five years of stall-farming and iniquity, had made the rounds of the six houses she rented, to turn out the tenants of the night who were disposed to linger. Many had already stripped themselves to their rags at pitch and toss in Jago Court; and the game still went busily on in the crowded area and in overflow groups in Old Jago Street, and men found themselves deprived, not merely of the money for that day's food and that night's lodging, but even of the last few

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pence set aside to back a horse for Tuesday's race. A little-regarded fight or two went on here and there as usual, and on kerbs and doorsteps sat women, hideous at all ages, filling the air with the rhetoric of the Jago.

Presently down from Edge Lane and the "Posties" came the High Mobsmen, swaggering in check suits and billycocks, gold chains and lumpy rings: stared at, envied, and here and there pointed out by name or exploit: "Him as done the sparks in from Regent Street for nine centuries o' quids"; "him as done five stretch for a snide bank bill an' they never found the 'oof"; "him as maced the bookies in France an' shot the nark in the boat"; and so forth. And the High Mob being come, the fight was due.

Of course, a fight merely as a fight was no great matter of interest; the thing was too common. But there was money on this; and again, it was no common thing to

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find Billy Leary defied, still less to find him challenged. Moreover, the thing had a Rann and Leary complexion, and it arose out of the battle of less than a fortnight back. So that Josh Perrott did not lack for partisans, though not a Rann believed he could stand long before Billy Leary. Billy's cause, too, had lost some popularity because it had been reported that Sally Green, in hospital, had talked of "summonsing" Nora Walsh in the matter of her mangled face; a scandalous device to overreach, a piece of foul practice repugnant to all proper feeling; more especially for such a distinguished Jago as Sally Green, so well able to take care of herself. But all this was nothing as affecting the odds. They ruled at three to one on Billy Leary, with few takers, and went to four to one before the fight began.

Josh Perrott had been strictly sober for a full week. And the family had lived better, for he had brought meat home each

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day. Now he sat indifferently at the window of his room, and looked out at the crowd in Jago Court till such time as he might be wanted. He had not been out of the room that morning: he was saving his energy for Billy Leary.

As for Dicky, he had scarce slept for excitement. For days he had enjoyed consideration among his fellows on account of this fight. Now he shook and quivered, and nothing relieved his agitation but violent exertion. So he rushed down stairs a hundred times to see if the High Mob were coming, and back to report that they were not. At last he saw their overbearing checks, and tore upstairs, face before knees, with "'Ere they are, father! 'Ere they are! They're comin' down the street, father!" and danced frenzied about the room and the landing.

Presently Jerry Gullen and Kiddo Cook came, as seconds, to take Josh out, and then Dicky quieted a little externally, though he was bursting at the chest and

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throat, and his chin jolted his teeth together uncontrollably. Josh dragged off his spotted coat and waistcoat and flung them on the bed, and was then helped out of his ill-mended blue shirt. He gave a hitch to his trousers-band, tightened his belt, and was ready.

“Ta-ta, ol’ gal,” he said to his wife, with a grin; “back agin soon.”

“With a bob or two for ye,” added Kiddo Cook, grinning likewise.

Hannah Perrott sat pale and wistful, with the baby on her knees. Through the morning she had sat so, wretched and helpless, sometimes putting her face in her hands, sometimes breaking out hopelessly:—“Do n’t, Josh, do n’t—good Gawd Josh, I wish you would n’t!’ or, “Josh, Josh, I wish I was dead!” Josh had fought before, it was true, and more than once, but then she had learned of the matter afterward. This preparation and long waiting were another thing. Once she

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had even exclaimed that she would go with him — though she meant nothing.

Now, as Josh went out at the door, she bent over Looey and hid her face again. “Good luck, father,” called Dicky, “Go it!” — though the words would hardly pass his throat, and he struggled to believe that he had no fear for his father.

No sooner was the door shut than he rushed to the window, though Josh could not appear in Jago Court for three or four minutes yet. The sash-line was broken, and the window had been propped open with a stick. In his excitement Dicky dislodged the stick, and the sash came down on his head, but he scarce felt the blow, and readjusted the stick with trembling hands, regardless of the bruise rising under his hair. “Aincher goin’ to look, mother?” he asked; “woncher ’old up Looey?”

But his mother would not look. As for Looey, she looked at nothing. She

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had been taken to the dispensary once again, and now lay drowsy and dull, with little more movement than a general shudder and a twitching of the face at long intervals; the little face itself was thinner and older than ever: horribly flea-bitten still, but bloodlessly pale. Mrs. Perrott had begun to think Looey was ailing for something; thought it might be measles or whooping-cough coming, and complained that children were a continual worry.

Dicky hung head and shoulders out of the window, clinging to the broken sill and scraping feverishly at the wall with his toes.

Jago Court was fuller than ever. The tossing went on, though now with more haste, that most might be made of the remaining time. A scuffle still persisted in one corner. Some stood to gaze at the High Mob, who, to the number of eight or ten, stood in an exalted group over

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against the back fences of New Jago Street; but the thickest knot was about Cocko Harnwell's doorstep, whereon sat Billy Leary, his head just visible through the press about him, waiting to keep his appointment.

Then a close group appeared at the archway, and pushed into the crowd, which made way at its touch, the disturbed tossers pocketing their coppers, but the others busily persisting, with no more than a glance aside between the spins. Josh Perrott's cropped head and bare shoulders marked the centre of the group, and as it came, another group moved out from Cocko Harnwell's doorstep, with Billy Leary's tall bulk shining pink and hairy in its midst.

"'E's in the Court, mother!" called Dicky, scraping faster with his toes.

The High Mobsmen moved up toward the middle of the court, and some from the two groups spread and pushed back the

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crowd. Still half a dozen couples, remote by the walls, tossed and tossed faster than ever, moving this way and that as the crowd pressed.

Now there was an irregular space of bare cobble stones and house refuse, five or six yards across, in the middle of Jago Court, and all round it the shouting crowd was packed tight, those at the back standing on sills and hanging to fences. Every window was a clump of heads, and women yelled savagely or cheerily down and across. The two groups were merged in the press at each side of the square, Billy Leary and Josh Perrott in front of each, with his seconds.

“Naa, then, any more ’fore they begin?” bawled a High Mobsman, turning about among his fellows. “Three to one on the big ’un—three to one! ’Ere, I’ll give four—four to one on Leary! Fourer one! Fourer one!”

But they shook their heads; they would

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wait a little. Leary and Perrott stepped out. The last of the tossers stuffed away his coppers and sought for a hold on the fence.

"They 're a-sparrin', mother!" cried Dicky, pale and staring, elbows and legs a-work, till he was like to pitch out of window. From his mother there but jerked a whimpering sob, which he did not hear.

The sparring was not long. There was little of subtlety in the milling of the Jago; mostly no more than a rough application of the main hits and guards, with much rushing and ruffianing. What there was of condition in the two men was Josh's: smaller and shorter, he had a certain hard brownness of hide that Leary, in his heavy opulence of flesh, lacked, and there was a horny quality in his face and hands that reminded the company of his boast of invulnerability to anything milder than steel; also his breadth of chest was

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great. Nevertheless, all odds seemed against him, by reason of Billy Leary's size, reach, and fighting record.

The men rushed together, and Josh was forced back by weight. Leary's great fists, left and right, shot into his face with smacking reports, but left no mark on the leathery skin, and Josh, fighting for the body, drove his knuckles into the other's ribs with a force that jerked a thick grunt from Billy's lips at each blow.

There was a roar of shouts. "Go it, father! Fa—ther! Fa—ther!" Dicky screamed from the window, till his voice broke in his throat and he coughed himself livid. The men were at holds, and swaying this way and that over the uneven stones. Blood ran copiously from Billy Leary's nose over his mouth and chin, and, as they turned, Dicky saw his father spit away a tooth over Leary's shoulder. They clipped and hauled to and fro, each striving to break the other's foothold. Then Per-

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rott stumbled at a hole, lost his feet and went down, with Leary on top.

Cheers and yells rent the air as each man was taken to his own side by his seconds. Dicky let go the sill and turned to his mother, wild of eye, breathless with broken chatter.

“Father ’it ’im on the nose, mother, like that—’is ribs is goin’ black where father pasted ’em—’e was out o’ breath fust—there’s blood all over his face, mother—father would ’a’ chucked ’im over if ’e ’ad n’t tumbled in a ’ole—father ’it ’im twice on the jore—’e—O!”

Dicky was back again on the sill, kicking and shouting, for time was called, and the two men rushed again into a tangled knot. But the close strife was short. Josh had but closed to spoil his man’s wind, and, leaving his head to take care of itself, stayed till he had driven left and right on the mark, and then got back. Leary came after him, gasping and blow-

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ing already, and Josh feinted a lead and avoided, bringing Leary round on his heel and off again in chase. Once more Josh met him, drove at his ribs and got away out of reach. Leary's wind was going fast, and his partisans howled savagely at Josh — perceiving his tactics — taunting him with running away, daring him to stand and fight. “I'll take that four to one,” called a High Mobsman to him who had offered the odds in the beginning. “I'll stand a quid on Perrott!”

“Not with me, you won't,” the other answered. “Evens, if you like.”

“Right. Done at evens, a quid.”

Perrott, stung at length by the shouts from Leary's corner, turned on Billy and met him at full dash. He was himself puffing by this, though much less than his adversary, and, at the cost of a heavy blow (which he took on his forehead), he visited Billy's ribs once more.

Both men were grunting and gasping

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now, and the sound of blows was as of the confused beating of carpets. Dicky, who had been afflicted to heart-burst by his father's dodging and running, which he mistook for simple flight, now broke into excited speech once more:—

“Father's 'it 'im on the jore again—'is eye 's a bungin' up—*Go it, father, bash 'i-i-i-m!* Father's landin'—'im—'e.”

Hannah Perrott crept to the window and looked. She saw the foul Jago mob, swaying and bellowing about the shifting edge of an open patch, in the midst whereof her husband and Billy Leary, bruised, bloody and gasping, fought and battered infuriately; and she crept back to the bed and bent her face on Looey's unclean little frock; till a fit of tense shuddering took the child, and the mother looked up again.

Without, the round ended. For a full minute the men took and gave knock for knock, and then Leary, wincing from

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another body-blow, swung his right desperately on Perrott's ear, and knocked him over.

Exulting shouts rose from the Leary faction, and the blow struck Dicky's heart still. But Josh was up almost before Kiddo Cook reached him, and Dicky saw a wide grin on his face as he came to his corner. The leathery toughness of the man, and the advantage it gave him, now grew apparent. He had endured to the full as much and as hard punching as had his foe — even more, and harder; once he had fallen on the broken cobble-stones with all Leary's weight on him, and once he had been knocked down on them. But, except for the sweat that ran over his face and down his back, and for a missing front tooth and the lip it had cut, he showed little sign of the struggle; while Leary's left eye was a mere slit in a black wen, his nose was a beaten mass, which had ensanguined him (and indeed Josh) from

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crown to waist, and his chest and flanks were a mottle of bruises.

“Father’s awright, mother—I see ’im laughin’. An’ ’e’s smashed Leary’s nose all over ’is face!”

Up again they sprang for the next round, Perrott active and daring, Leary cautious and a trifle stiff. Josh rushed in and struck at the tender ribs once more, took two blows callously on his head, and sent his left at the nose, with a smack as of a flail on water. With that Leary rushed like a bull, and Josh was driven and battered back, for the moment without response. But he ducked and slipped away and came again, fresh and vicious. And now it was seen that Perrott’s toughness of hand was lasting. Leary’s knuckles were raw, cut, and flayed, and took little good by the shock when they met the other’s stubborn muzzle; while Josh still flung in his corneous fists, hard and lasting as a bag of bullets.

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But suddenly, stooping to reach the mark once more, Josh's foot turned on a projecting stone, and he floundered forward into Billy's arms. Like a flash his neck was clipped in the big man's left arm — Josh Perrott was in chancery. Quick and hard Leary pounded the imprisoned head, while Jerry Gullen and Kiddo Cook danced distracted and dismayed, and the crowd whooped and yelled.

Dicky hung delirious over the sill, and shrieked he knew not what. He saw his father fighting hard at the back and ribs with both hands, and Leary hammering his face in a way to make pulp of an ordinary mazzard. Then suddenly Josh Perrott's right hand shot up from behind, over Leary's shoulder, and gripped him at the chin. Slowly, with tightened muscles, he forced his man back over his bent knee, Leary clinging and swaying, but impotent to struggle. Then with an extra wrench from Josh, up came Leary's feet from the

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ground, higher, higher, till suddenly Josh flung him heavily over, heels up, and dropped on him with all his weight.

The Ranns roared again. Josh was up in a moment, sitting on Kiddo Cook's knee, and taking a drink from a bottle. Billy Leary lay like a man fallen from a housetop. His seconds turned him on his back and dragged him to his corner. There he lay limp and senseless, and there was a cut at the back of his head.

The High Mobsman who held the watch waited for half a minute and then called "Time !" Josh Perrott stood up, but Billy Leary was knocked out of knowledge, and heard not. He was beaten.

Josh Perrott was involved in a howling, dancing crowd, and was pushed, grinning, this way and that, slapped on the back, and offered drinks. In the outskirts the tossers, inveterate, pulled out their pence and resumed their game.

Dicky spun about, laughing, flushed,

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and elated, and as soon as the door was distinct to his dazzled sight, he ran off downstairs. His mother, relieved and even pleased, speculated as to what money the thing might bring. She put the baby on the bed, and looked from the window.

Josh, in the crowd, shouted and beckoned her, pointing and tapping his bare shoulder. He wanted his clothes. She gathered together the shirt, the coat, and the waistcoat, and hurried downstairs. Looey could come to no harm lying on the bed for a few minutes. And, indeed, Hannah Perrott felt that she would be a person of distinction in the crowd, and was not sorry to have an excuse for going out.

“Three cheers for the missis!” sang out Kiddo Cook as she came through the press. “I said ’e’d ’ave a bob or two for you, did n’t I?”

Josh Perrott, indeed, was rich — a cap-

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italist of five pounds. For a sovereign a side had been put up, and his backer had put on a sovereign for him at three to one. So that now it became him to stand beer to many sympathizers. Also, he felt that the missis should have some part in the celebration, for was it not her injury that he had avenged on Sally Green's brother? So Hannah Perrott, pleased but timorous, was hauled away with the rest to Mother Gapp's.

Here she sat by Josh's side for an hour. Once or twice she thought of Looey, but with native inertness she let the thought slip. Perhaps Dicky would be back, and at any rate it was hard if she must not take half an hour's relaxation once in a way. At last came Dicky, urgent perplexity in his face, looking in at the door. Josh, minded to be generous all round, felt for a penny.

"Mother," said Dicky, plucking at her arm, "Pigeony Poll's at 'ome, nussin'

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Looev ; she told me to tell you to come at once."

Pigeony Poll ? What right had she in the room ? The ghost of Hannah Perrott's respectability rose in resentment. She supposed she must go. She arose, mystified, and went, with Dicky at her skirts.

Pigeony Poll sat by the window with the baby in her arms, and pale misgiving in her dull face. " I — I come in, Mrs. Perrott, mum," she said, with a hush in her thick voice, " I come in 'cos I see you goin' out, an' I thought the baby'd be alone. She — she's 'ad a sort 'o fit — all stiff an' blue in the face an' grindin' 'er little mouth. She's left awf now — but I — I dunno wot to make of 'er. She's so — so — "

Hannah Perrott stared blankly, and lifted the child, whose arm dropped and hung. The wizen age had gone from Looev's face, and the lids were down on the strained

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eyes; her pale lips lay eased of the old pinching—even parted in a smile. For she looked in the face of the angel that plays with the dead children.

Hannah Perrott's chin fell. "Lor," she said bemusedly, and sat on the bed.

An odd croaking noise broke in jerks from Pigeony Poll as she crept from the room, with her face bowed in the bend of her arm, like a weeping schoolboy. Dicky stared, confounded. . . .

Josh came and gazed stupidly, with his mouth open, walking tiptoe. But at a word from Kiddo Cook, who came in his tracks, he snatched the little body and clattered off to the dispensary, to knock up the young student.

The rumour went in the Jago that Josh Perrott was in double luck. For here was insurance money without a doubt. But in truth that was a thing the Perrotts had neglected.

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* * * * *

Hannah Perrott felt a listless relief; Josh felt nothing in particular, except that there was no other thing to be done, and that Mother Gapp's would be a cheerful place to finish the day in, and keep up the missis's pecker.

So that eight o'clock that evening at Perrott's witnessed a darkening room wherein an inconsiderable little corpse lay on a bed; while a small ragamuffin spread upon it with outstretched arms, exhausted with sobbing, a soak of muddy tears:—"O Looney, Looney! Can't you 'ear? Won't you never come to me no more?"

And the Reverend Henry Sturt, walking from church through Luck Row toward his lodgings in Kingsland Road, heard shouts and riot behind the grimy panes of Mother Gapp's, and in the midst the roar of many voices joined in the Jago chant:

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*Six bloomin' long months in a prison,
Six more bloomin' months I must stay,
For meetin' a bloke in our alley
An' takin' 'is ticker away!
Toora-li—toora-il—looral,
Toora-li—toora-li—lay,
A-coshin' a bloke in our alley,
An' taking 'is uexter away!*





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